

“THIS IS A NEW ERA OF SLIPKNOT” — COREY TAYLOR

METAL HAMMER

8



ISSUE 366



OZZY OSBOURNE
“I can’t do all this once I’m dead”

ELECTRIC CALLBOY
Mullets. Moustaches.
The rise of a phenomenon

ALICE IN CHAINS
Lzzy Hale, Kerry King
and more pay tribute

DAVE LOMBARDO
On WW3 and keeping up with Lemmy

GAEREA
Meet the secret saviours of black metal

+

LAMB OF GOD
HARPER
ENSLAVED
INCUBUS
GLORIA CAVALERA
IMPERIAL TRIUMPHANT
CHARLOTTE WESSELS
SKINDRED

SLIPKNOT

NEW ALBUM. NEW MASKS. NEW WEIRDNESS.

FIVE FINGER DEATH PUNCH



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IVAN, ZOLTAN AND CHRIS STAR IN
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Future PLC, 121 - 141 Westbourne Terrace, Paddington, London, W2 6JR
 Web: www.metalhammer.com
 Letters: metalhammer@futurenet.com

Editorial

Editor **Eleanor Goodman**
eleanor.goodman@futurenet.com
 Production Editor **Vanessa Thorpe**
vanessa.thorpe@futurenet.com
 Reviews Editor **Jonathan Selzer**
jonathan.selzer@futurenet.com
 Art Editor **Louise Brock**
louise.brock@futurenet.com
 Associate Editor **Dave Everley**
dave.everley@futurenet.com
 Staff Writer **Rich Hobson**
rich.hobson@futurenet.com
 Content Director - Music **Scott Rowley**

Contributors

Steve Appleford, Oliver Badin, Adam Brennan, Richard Chamberlain, Chris Chantler, Alec Chillingworth, Joe Daly, Hywel Davies, Remfry Dedman, Alex Deller, Jerry Ewing, Spencer Grady, Stephen Hill, Emma Johnston, Tyler Damara Kelly, Hannah May Kilroy, Dom Lawson, Elliot Leaver, Danni Leivers, Dave Ling, Clay Marshall, Will Marshall, Sophie Maughan, Edwin McFee, Joel McIver, Matt Mills, Morat, Tom O'Boyle, Alastair Riddell, Liz Scarlett, Rosie Solomon, Kevin Stewart-Panko, James Weaver, Christina Wenig, Kez Whelan, Jon Wiederhorn, Holly Wright, Nik Young

Cover Photography: Jonathan Weiner **Image Manipulation:** Chris Saggars
 Subbing: Jayne Nelson

Photography

Justin Borucki, Derek Bremner, Steve Bright, Janson Bulpin, Stephanie Cabral, Duncan Everson, Nick Fancher, Andy Ford, Mick Hutson, Will Ireland, Simon Kallas, George Chin, Tina Korhonen, Marie Korner, Dave LePage, John McMurtrie, Kevin Nixon, Katja Ogrin, Jake Owens, Emma Painter, Tom Russell, Jeremy Saffer, Anthony Scanga, Ester Segarra, James Sharrock, Travis Shinn, Frank White, Jonathan Weiner, Dani Willgress, Neil Zlozower
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Media packs are available on request
 Advertising Sales Director **Lara Jaggon** - lara.jaggon@futurenet.com
 Account Director **Steven Pyatt** - steven.pyatt@futurenet.com
 Account Director **Ayomide Magbagbeola** - ayomide.magbagbeola@futurenet.com
 Sales Executive **Saskia Pemberton** - saskia.pemberton@futurenet.com

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 Head of Print Licensing **Rachel Shaw** - licensing@futurenet.com

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 Head of subscriptions **Sharon Todd**

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Circulation

Head of Newstrade **Tim Mathers**

Production

Head of Production **Mark Constance**
 Head of Production **Tom Reynolds**
 Senior Ad Production Manager **Jo Crosby**
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Management

Managing Director - Music **Stuart Williams**
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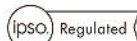
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 Chief executive **Edith Byrne-Thorne**
 Non-executive chairman **Richard Huntingford**
 Chief financial officer **Henry Ludkin-Saunders**
 Tel: +44 (0)225 442 244



OLD DOES NOT MEAN DEAD...

WHEN PAUL GRAY tragically passed away in 2010, there was a question mark over whether Slipknot would continue without their vital founding member and beloved bandmate. For the sake of the music, they did. When they parted ways with the none-more-legendary Joey Jordison in 2013, still, they moved forwards, the collective bigger than any individual. And by the time Chris Fehn exited in 2019, it seemed obvious they'd forge onwards.

Now, the nonet are entering what Corey Taylor describes as a new era, and with their modern-day line-up established, they've created their most experimental album in 18 years with *The End, So Far*. They might not be the original Nine of '99, huffing dead crows and vomiting, but they've transmogrified into a surprising beast who are still able to mess with our heads, bang the shit out of barrels, and write riffs that melt the faces of the competition. Long may they bring the pain.

Elsewhere in the issue, our Rich Hobson sits down with Ozzy Osbourne for a candid chat about his current era, and finds a defiant icon who's determined to make the most of his time on Earth. Going by brilliant new album *Patient Number 9*, it's working out for him.

Right, I'm off to build a shrine around my Eddie Munson print. Until next time...

Stay metal,

E

ELEANOR GOODMAN
 EDITOR

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MEET THE BAND



RICH HOBSON
 WRITER

Our staff writer across the magazine and online, Rich is a relentless ideas factory and an eternal giver of lifts. He's also a proud Brummie and Sabbath fan, which made him the ideal candidate for penning this month's Ozzy feature.



DANNI LEIVERS
 WRITER

This month, we sent Danni to Germany, for Electric Callboy's biggest show to date. There were mullets and moustaches, shell suits and streamers, and the party to end all parties. It was so fun, she's costuming up for their forthcoming UK tour.



JONATHAN SELZER
 WRITER

He's the lord of the reviews section, dweller of the underground, possessor of an evil laugh, and consumer of vast quantities of salty liquorice. For this issue, he travelled to Porto to uncover the mysteries of rising BM phenomenon Gaerea.



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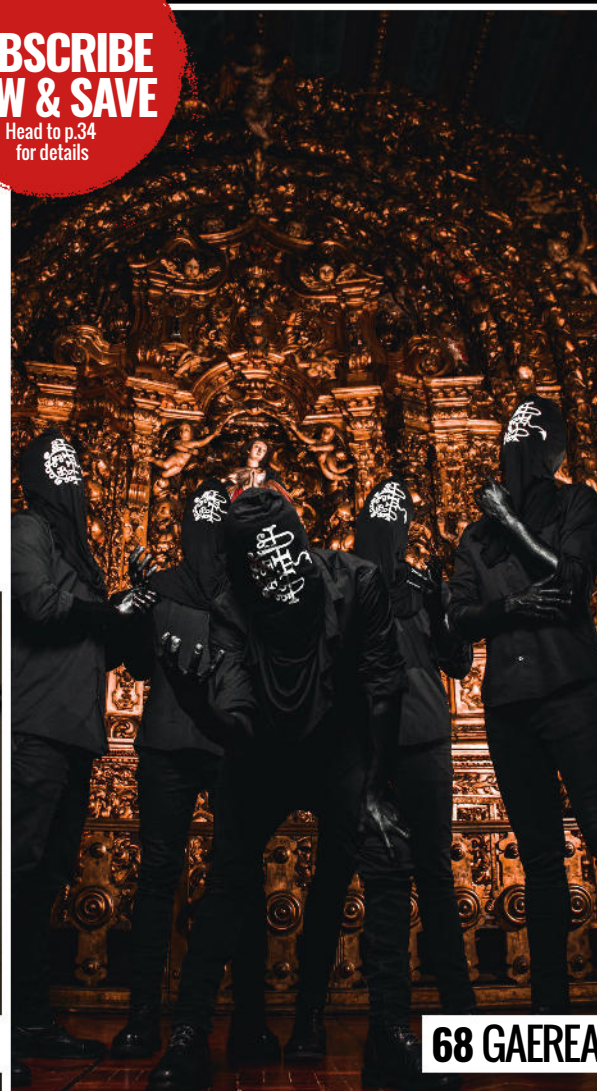
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THE BIG PICTURE

MOST. METAL(LICA). EVER.

METALLICA'S MASTER OF *Puppets* has been inescapable this summer and it's all thanks to *Stranger Things*. Featured at the climax of the Netflix show's fourth season, ...*Puppets* is part of a set piece involving a guitar, beloved new cast member Eddie Munson and a seemingly endless horde of winged monsters. Suffice to say, it was *metal AF* and has helped the magic of Metallica (and heavy metal as a whole) reach a brand new audience, including getting the 36-year-old song back in the charts on both sides of the Atlantic.

Considering they'd been using clips of the show as part of their live set, it was the least Metallica could do to invite Joseph Quinn – the actor who played Eddie Munson – backstage to hang out when they played Lollapalooza. Sitting with Joseph, James Hetfield shared that he'd been a fan of the show since its first season, before offering the British actor a chance to jam the thrash anthem with the band. As a final touch of class, Metallica even gifted Joseph a guitar that looked like a replica of his *Stranger Things* model and signed it, to the actor's visible delight. Talk about dreams coming true! 🇺🇸





THE HOT TOPIC

COBRA KAI IS BACK AND KICKING ASS

Thor had Guns N' Roses. *Stranger Things* had Metallica. We're seeing a renaissance of rock and metal bands popping up in TV and film – but how did Aussie rockers Airbourne become the house (dojo?) band for hit Netflix series *Cobra Kai*?

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

HEAVY METAL IS back on the big screen. Or on screens at least, as this past summer has seen everything from *Thor: Love and Thunder* utilising Guns N' Roses tunes in battle scenes to *Stranger Things* bringing Kate Bush and Metallica back into the mainstream consciousness (and the charts) in some of the most iconic TV moments of the decade so far. Now fellow Netflix hit series *Cobra Kai* is the next show to bring rock and metal to the masses as Aussie rock'n'rollers Airbourne soundtrack one of this year's most badass fight scenes.

"We're just mega-pumped to be part of it!" enthuses vocalist Joel O'Keeffe. "It's a very cool show – the way it connects with people is really fucking cool and that's what we love. It's a real audience-engaging thing and there's a loyalty there, which is exactly what we want to align ourselves with. So to have your song on that, to be part of those good times or kickass moments makes us mega-appreciative."

A reboot/sequel to 80s mega-franchise *The Karate Kid*, *Cobra Kai* flips the script on the first movie by featuring original villain/bully Johnny



Lawrence as one of the show's core protagonists, even bringing back stars William Zabka and Ralph Macchio as Johnny Lawrence and Daniel LaRusso respectively. Picking up 34 years after *The Karate Kid*, season one of *Cobra Kai* shows that life hasn't been kind to Johnny since his loss to Daniel at the 1984 All-Valley Karate Tournament – he works a dead-end job, is estranged from his son and struggles with alcoholism and depression. But after being forced to use karate to defend his young neighbour Miguel Diaz from a group of bullies, Johnny is inspired to re-open his old dojo – the titular Cobra Kai – and teach a new generation "how to be badasses".

"They used one of our songs – *Back In The Game* – in one of the first ever trailers," Joel says. "I'm an 80s kid, so I grew up worshipping *Karate Kid* and doing the kicks at school. When they told me they were bringing back the original characters and wanted to use one of our songs, it was like, 'What?! Of course!' I loved it before the show was even out."

Four seasons of bullies, fights and – of course – training montages later, *Cobra Kai* has become a huge Netflix hit after moving from its original home on YouTube, earning fans including Exodus guitarist Gary Holt – whose band were called a 'shitty Metallica' in one episode – and Dee Snider, who appeared in a live performance in the third season. A massive love letter not



Cobra Kai features *Karate Kid* alumni William Zabka (who plays Johnny Lawrence), Ralph Macchio (Daniel LaRusso) and Yuji Okumoto (Chozen Toguchi)

only to the original film series but the 80s as a whole, *Cobra Kai* has been consistently metal-friendly as the likes of Mötley Crüe, Ratt and Judas Priest have all popped up on the soundtrack. But Airbourne might just be the most prominently featured band of the series, having had *Back In The Game*, *Breakin' Out Of Hell* and now *Runnin' Wild* all featured in pivotal scenes.

"The first time I saw one of our songs in the show, I was like, 'This is badass! This is better than all our music videos combined – why can't we get them to do our videos?'" Joel says with an enormous grin. "We're mega-appreciative – during the pandemic they helped keep us relevant even though we weren't releasing albums."

Considering the massive impact appearing on TV has had on Metallica

"I GREW UP WORSHIPPING KARATE KID!"

JOEL O'KEEFFE



Airbourne: kicking ass and eardrums

lately, it's not surprising that bands are eager to see their music similarly adopted by screens both big and small. As Joel explains, it offers massive opportunities for bands who don't necessarily benefit from the traditional industry methods of mass marketing.

"We've never been one of those bands that gets flogged on the radio," Joel admits. "The only way we've been able to build fanbases is going back to the same town a hundred times until they all bring their mates and sell the joint out. So for bands who don't have that airplay, getting onto a show like *Cobra Kai* is massive as it has global reach."

While we won't go too far into spoiler territory, *Cobra Kai*'s fifth season is bigger than ever before, series uber-villain Terry Silver

(Thomas Ian Griffith) now firmly in the spotlight after first appearing in the third *Karate Kid* movie. With some brilliantly choreographed fight scenes, shout-outs to Black Sabbath and a kickass soundtrack, *Cobra Kai* is one show that metalheads and rockers shouldn't sleep on.

"Oh you gotta watch *Cobra Kai*!" Joel says animatedly. "Even if you're not a fan of the original movies or haven't seen them – and you really should – it's a great show that really makes you feel good. As we're all coming out of this Covid/pandemic stuff it's a real escape – a rock'n'roll show that'll entertain you and leave you wanting more." **H**

COBRA KAI SEASON 5 IS STREAMING NOW VIA NETFLIX

10 THINGS WE LEARNED THIS MONTH

What's been blowing our tiny brains

OPETH LOVE ANIMALS

A candid snap from ArcTanGent showed them meeting a huge pig at Fernhill Farm. "It had massive bollocks," Mikael Åkerfeldt told the crowd that night.

OZZY'S STILL GOT IT...

He came home to Birmingham to close out the Commonwealth Games, playing Black Sabbath classics alongside Tony Iommi, drummer Tommy Clufetos and bassist Adam Wakeman.

...AND HE'S FLYING HIGH

A 25-foot inflatable of the Prince Of Darkness has been popping up across the US to help promote Ozzy's new album, *Patient Number 9*.

FOOTBALL'S HOME!

The Lionesses brought football home after beating Germany 2-1 in the Euro final. G'wan!

TOMMY LEE IS A POSER

The Mötley Crüe drummer set the internet alight when he posted a full-frontal nude shot on Instagram... twice.

ZACK DE LA ROCHA IS TAKING TIME OFF TO HEAL

Following his leg injury and under medical advice, Rage Against The Machine cancelled their Reading & Leeds slots and were replaced by The 1975. Gutting. Get well soon, Zack!

GHOST ARE IN THE SINGLES CHARTS – THANKS TO TIKTOK

Mary On A Cross currently sits at No.43 on the UK singles charts, the band's highest placing to date.

AMY LEE AND JONATHAN DAVIS ARE A GREAT DOUBLE ACT

They duetted on *Freak On A Leash* on their US tour. Please come to the UK!

THE DANI FILTH/ED SHEERAN COLLAB IS ACTUALLY HAPPENING

Dani confirmed it. It's gonna be weird...

MACHINE HEAD'S NEW SONGS SOUND INSANE LIVE

A decade since they headlined Bloodstock, Machine Head made a surprise appearance in the Sophie Lancaster tent. It was very, very sweaty.



Machine Fucking Head, people!



WOULD YOU CONSIDER PLAYING IN KERRY KING'S NEW BAND?

Whether he's drumming for Testament or Slayer, the Misfits or Mike Patton, Dave Lombardo is a percussive legend. But how will he fare against your questions about *Stranger Things*, punk rock and partying hard?

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL • PICTURES: STEPHANIE CABRAL

HE CALLS HIMSELF "ADD Dave" due to his manic style, and is one of the busiest and most iconic drummers in the history of thrash metal, having worked with pretty much all of your musical heroes over his four-decade-long career. So Dave Lombardo was never going to be fazed by facing your toughest questions.

For the next hour he is open and still clearly enthused by the many projects he's involved in, coming across as a massive music-lover in general. He happily waxes lyrical about his love of punk, thrash, jazz, Lemmy, Mike Patton, duetting with avant-garde composer John Zorn and getting the seal of approval from jazz legend Miles Davis.

Was it hard to get your head around playing the Fantômas music live? Did it kind of feel like a metal piss-take?

@SpiritWalkTalk

"That's an interesting question. When I first heard Fantômas I felt immediately connected. [Mike] Patton has always said he wrote those drum parts with me in mind. So when I heard it, I immediately understood it. We had to rehearse a lot of changes – tempo changes. I would have to pick up brushes and then hit a bell in the middle of a song, so it was challenging, but it was fun and it taught me a lot about music."

What did you learn from playing with John Zorn?

Michael Butterfield, Facebook

"Freedom! Freedom to express yourself musically in any way you want, without any genre, without any borders. That whole: 'Oh, I'm Dave Lombardo, I'm supposed to play *this* sort of music!' Well, with John there is none of that. He made me feel comfortable in enjoying other music and to not be afraid. We played the Louvre, the glass pyramid, a duet between the two of us; that should tell you everything about him. I don't have enough words to describe him. A hyper-intelligent dude."

The producers of *Stranger Things* ask you to pick one song you've played on

to feature in the show's last season. Which one do you pick and why?

Kate Worth, Facebook

"I haven't watched *Stranger Things*! Ha ha ha! It's an 80s retro thing, right? So I guess I go for something I recorded in the 80s... *Chemical Warfare*. It's a heavy song, it's very 80s, it's nostalgic and it's got a certain vibe to it. In the 80s we thought we were in World War III. It captures that feeling."

Would you have signed up for Kerry King's new band, if you'd been asked?

@WKDPower

"I knew that was coming! I am, right now, working on too many other projects and I wouldn't be able to accept. New Dead Cross, Mr. Bungle... the pandemic put a lot of stuff on hold, so we need to play some catch-up there. Besides that, he's got Paul Bostaph, and I don't think he would have the need to ask me."

How did you first meet Mike Patton and what is your favourite story about hanging out together?

Beckie Morton, Facebook

"We met at Faith No More's last show before they took a hiatus in the 90s. Robert Trujillo was there. We were all sitting backstage. We met and started talking about music, what I was doing post-Slayer. Best memory? There are so many great memories with that ▶



DAVE LOMBARD

Dave Lombardo's played at the Louvre. Glass pyramids are metal

**“WE THOUGHT WE WERE
IN WORLD WAR III”**

DAVE LOMBARD

DAVE LOMBARDO

guy, it's hard to pinpoint one. Here's one: with Fantômas, we'd play a show, walk offstage, and for the encore he had written a song that's never been recorded, only played live. Patton and I would stay backstage. Buzz [Osborne] and Trevor [Dunn] would go out and they'd play this monotonous riff for two to three minutes. We'd just sit there and drink and chat. 'Shall we go now?' 'Nah, just make them wait a little longer.' And then we'd eventually walk out, hit that down beat and it was always an amazing moment."

Who partied hardest in thrash in the 80s?

Jack Bullen, Facebook

"I would say Lemmy. Come on, man! Nobody could keep up with that guy!"

I'd love to hear your thoughts on Grip Inc. after all this time – to me that is one of the most criminally underrated bands of the past 25 years.

@mcshriek

"It's unfortunate that [vocalist] Gus Chambers passed away. He was such a big part of the sound and songwriting that he's irreplaceable. I loved that band, it was awesome. It was new, it was fresh, it was the first time I stepped out of Slayer and did something in my own direction. It's so sad that I can no longer jam with those guys."

If Slayer returned to the stage and asked you to play again, would you?

@jagggarcia

"I don't think that's ever going to happen. But, yeah, I'd listen to whatever it is they had to say. That's it, you can't go any further than that."

How did you end up joining Testament and what's it like working with those guys?

Paul Guy, Facebook

"I woke up one morning and my wife says to me, 'You wanna hear the gossip?' I go, 'No more Kanye! Please!' She said, 'No, Gene [Hoglan] left Testament.' I picked up my phone, texted Chuck [Billy] and said, 'Hey man, I don't have anything lined up this year – if you need a drummer, let me know.' He called me right away and we figured out the schedule. Here I am, doing the second leg of the tour in Europe and it's been great working with these guys! Master musicians."

"NOBODY COULD KEEP UP WITH LEMMY IN THE 80s"

DAVE LOMBARDO



Sticks akimbo:
Miles Davis admired
Dave's style

What are your Top 5 punk albums of all-time?

@VOL4Bourbon

"An easy one there! Minor Threat's *Out Of Step*, Circle Jerks' *Group Sex*, Dead Kennedys' *In God We Trust, Inc.*, GBH's *Leather, Bristles, Studs And Acne*. And The Exploited. Mr. Bungle covered *Fuck The USA* recently. That was fun."

Do you know Miles Davis admired your drumming?

@Ignitor28626097

"Yes, apparently his son was watching MTV in the early 90s. I guess it was around the time we released *War Ensemble* or *Seasons In The Abyss*. [Miles] came into the room and his son, Erin, thought Miles was going to get mad: 'What the hell are you listening to, man?' But he said, 'Wow! That drummer is laying it down!' Pretty proud moment. For Miles Davis to hear your drumming and say that... that's awesome right there."

Do Glenn Danzig and Jerry Only get on OK these days?

James Whiteman, Facebook

"They get along very well. I've never heard or seen anything negative from those two, it's been a great experience. A lot of people comment, 'You are really dumbing down your playing, Dave!' But no, when you play that music, a lot goes into it. You have to be energetic, obviously; you have to be

precise. The recording they did make with their original drummers, they didn't follow a click track; they were rough, it was punk! They captured those special moments on record, but when you go out and play it live, I have 37 songs in my brain. Glenn calls them out onstage and you need to start the right song – you can't fuck up."

What are you listening to lately?

@RIP_restinpain

"A drummer recently rattled my brain: Daru Jones, who's been playing with Jack White. He's also in a band called Th1rt3en. These are bands I just come across on YouTube when I'm doing my late-night hangs with my wife, getting our drink on and going down these rabbit holes. Very inspiring."

When are we getting the Misfits here in the UK?

Luke Long, Facebook

"I wish. I would love to do it. I'm sure I've heard people say, 'We should get over to the UK!' in rehearsals. We just have to get those massive pumpkins over there! When it does happen, it's going to be off the hook." H

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THE SLAYLIST

ZACHARY EZRIN

Imperial Triumphant's frontman gets eclectic, with everything from dissonant death metal to 80s space opera and jazzy dad rock

WORDS: WILL MARSHALL

"METALLICA'S *BLACKENED* IS special to me because I had never heard heavy metal before. And then my uncle bought me ...*And Justice For All*. It was the heaviest thing I'd ever heard and that was the big bang for my musical journey, slowly getting into heavier stuff like black metal. *Mother North* is the black metal anthem. A lot of bands have tried to write a staple, anthemic piece but no one else has come close. It's got all these peaks and valleys that make it so exciting to listen to over and over; there's a lot to learn from this, from a songwriting perspective. SATYRICON just don't give a fuck either, they're gonna do what they want!

"PORTAL are my favourite band and *Catafalque* is a great song because it is so abrasive. On the surface it's just raw chaos, but the more you listen to it, the more details and little minute obscurities you discover. They're playing music how HP Lovecraft wrote books – sometimes that involves playing sloppy, that's just part of the presentation of the art. ALFRED SCHNITTKE is one of my favourite modern composers. *Requiem* straddles both worlds of tonality and atonality. It has a drum kit in one of the pieces, which in a classical piece is unbelievable. I feel like a lot of these composers would have listened to metal, if it was around. These mid-century guys were creating Portal riffs on orchestras. It's insane!

"When we were at Mystic Festival, I saw a lot of people with ODRAZA shirts. Nobody talks about them. It's blackened death metal and they experiment with a lot of different styles and instrumentation. I chose ...*twoj q rzec tez* because they very much stole a riff, which they're being super-obvious about; they're quoting the main melody from The Beatles' *She's So Heavy*, which is, as we all know, the real birth of heavy metal. Speaking of which, KLAUS NOMI is an

"A LOT OF CLASSICAL COMPOSERS WOULD HAVE LISTENED TO METAL"

Zachary insists that every metal fan should have a little listen to Steely Dan



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opera/80s art rock singer from Germany and his version of *Wayward Sisters* is my favourite. He does these 80s, space-ish covers of [English composer] Henry Purcell pieces, and he can sing unbelievably perfect opera. It's like something you'd hear from Judas Priest! It's super-80s with distorted harpsichords, and such an interesting take on opera music.

"These days, grindcore is basically the only thing I listen to when I go to the gym. A Russian friend showed me TSYGUN's *Let There Be Gloom!* and I thought, 'Fuck, this rocks!' Part of me says, 'I do not want to write this music but I definitely want to listen to it.' It's great if you want a less challenging listen, though that's all relative. MOONDOG is a composer from the 60s, 70s that lived in New York. My grandfather was telling me about this guy that they called The Viking Of Sixth Avenue, a semi-homeless person who would just busk in the street, and he had a huge beard and wore a big horned helmet! *Bird's Lament* is jazzy and classical at the same time, he puts these great rhythms in his music that you don't really find in classical music. His style and his influence slides in with our more non-metal aspects. It's so important to listen to lots of different styles to write heavy metal.

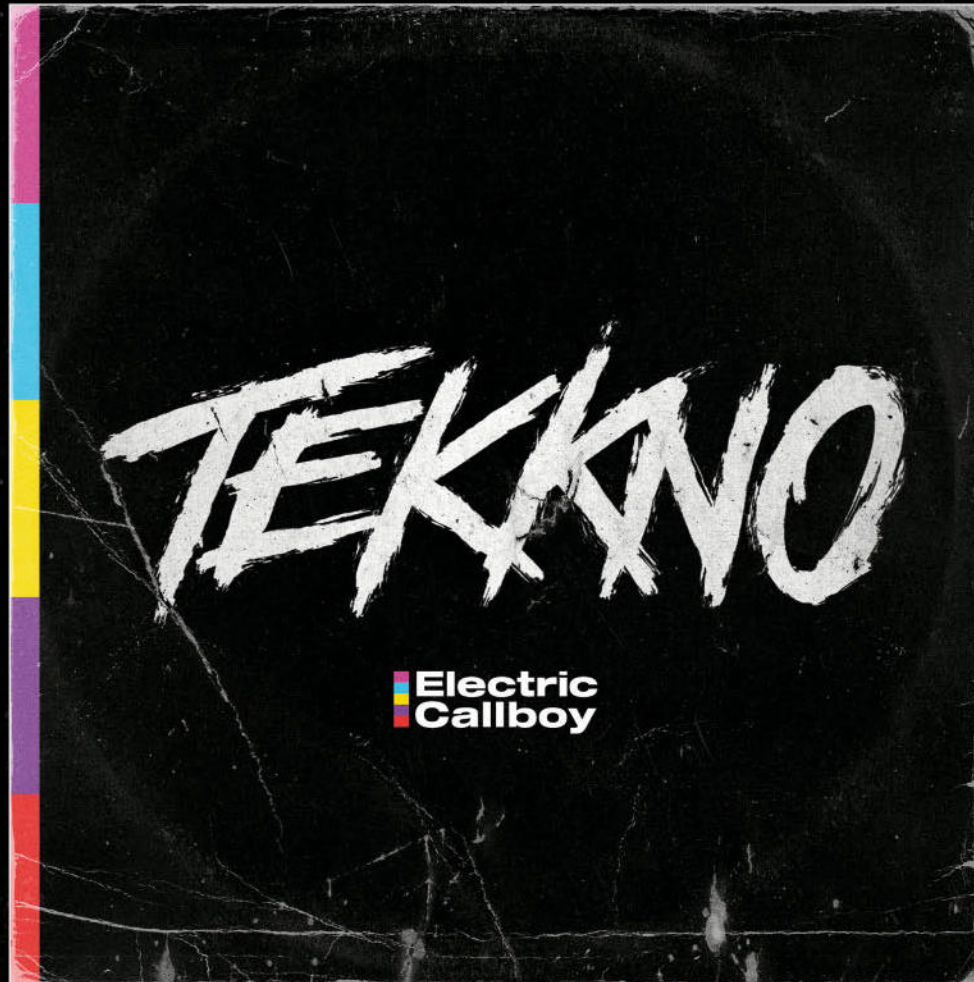
"On our live album, we posed as the members of DUKE ELLINGTON's band for the cover. *Money Jungle* is an unbelievable song written by three of the greatest jazz musicians ever. They're a trio much like us, trying to fill a space. They're all playing different rhythms and all playing different chords, but it's all blending perfectly together. It's a huge part of what we do, taking up our own space.

"The last few years, I've become a big fan of STEELY DAN. I grew up hearing it and as a rebellious teenager, I fucking hated it! Then I realised, once you listen to something like *Kings* with a different perspective, it's so clean and the songwriting is so clever. The solo here is this really crazy, intricate, dissonant solo in a very tonal, jazz rock piece. I implore every metalhead to try getting into Steely Dan." **H**

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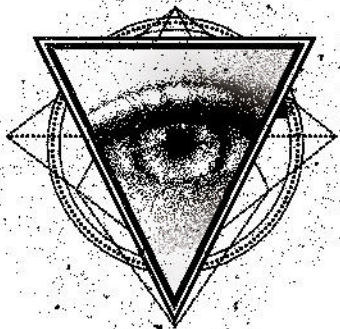
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IN THE STUDIO

ENSLAVED

Black metal's most fearless explorers are blasting full-thrust towards space rock and thrash

WORDS: MATT MILLS • PICTURES: ROY BJØRGE

ENSLAVED HAVE ALWAYS

been black metal's most boundary-destroying Vikings. They dabbled in jangling synths on 1994's debut album *Vikingligr Veldi*, when the scene was still defined by blastbeats and Satanism, and since then have pillaged tones from prog, psych, folk and post-rock.

Even now, 31 years deep, there's no sign of the Norwegians' eclecticism fading. When *Hammer* sits down with guitarist, co-founder and lead songwriter Ivar Bjørnson, he promises that the 16th Enslaved album will be a space rock- and thrash metal-inspired axe to the skull. Just don't expect straight-up kvlt black metal...

What are we getting and when are we getting it?

Ivar Bjørnson: "When, it's not exact. I'm not hiding anything, because I'm not entirely sure. This process has been so all-encompassing for the last year and a half, so, now the album's done and the artwork's in, I'm just spacing out: 'Don't even tell me!' And what you're getting is our 16th album, so it's got that Spinal Tap vibe. 'What's so special about your 16th album,' you ask? That difficult 16th album! Ha ha!"

On last year's *Caravans To The Outer Worlds* EP, Enslaved went space rock. Will the new album continue in that direction?

"Kind of. It definitely has that, but it's also more focused. It's more metal, I think. As a guitarist, I've been listening to a lot of my heroes, especially [Mayhem's] *De Mysteriis*



THE FACTS

ALBUM:
16

STUDIO:
Various, Norway

PRODUCER:
Enslaved

EXPECT:
The Enslaved palette to get even more colourful with some cosmic thrash textures

Dom Sathanas and Bathory, but also the thrash bands that I was really into when I started playing. The Teutonic ones, like Destruction, Kreator and Sodom. I've really enjoyed a lot of thrashing on this album."

Is this the fastest Enslaved album?

"It's the most intentionally fast. There's a song on this album [the lead single, *Kingdom*] with blastbeats, where we're really paying homage to what Darkthrone invented and called 'cross-country ski blasts': a bit slower, but more consistent. We mix that in with the more Enslaved progressive elements. There's a lot of 80s heavy metal riffing as well. It's a weird song."

Utgard was delayed due to the pandemic, released in October 2020, and then you couldn't tour it. Did frustration from that make you want to thrash harder on this album?

"My family had this unreal luck where my youngest kid would get Covid, then the next one, then me and the wife. On the last day of isolation, the next person would get it. From December 5 of last year to January 15, we were all locked in the house. [When writing] I worked nights – having kids, there's a lot of sleep deprivation involved – and you get a bit spaced out.

I had a lot of great experiences in headphones, headbanging by myself, and then: 'Whoa! Three hours have passed!' That's when you know you have a good riff: you play it on a loop."

Why did you self-produce the album again this time?

"I'd be curious to work with an outside producer, but how would that work? We're so used to how we work and two guys in the band [drummer Iver Sandøy and guitarist Arve Isdal] have studios. But I'd be open to it at some point. Steven Wilson, give us a call!"

Now that you're dabbling in even more genres, are Enslaved still a black metal band?

"We'll always be associated with that movement, but I've said from day one that we're not actually a black metal band. For us, black metal will always be extreme metal with a Satanic ideology, and that we'll never have. But we still revisit our roots. [Mayhem founder] Euronymous was my main inspiration for guitar playing and as a songwriter."

What do you want this album to achieve for the band?

"Worldwide dictatorship. I'd ban social media and go back to typewriters." **H**

ENSLAVED'S 16TH ALBUM IS EXPECTED IN EARLY 2023 VIA NUCLEAR BLAST

Grutle Kjellson hard at work on the lucky 16th. Below: Iver Sandøy and Ivar Bjørnson (right)



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AS FRONTMAN OF Skindred, Benji Webbe is a beloved fixture of the UK metal scene – a master of ceremonies whose reggae/metal fusion never fails to get the party started. Now Benji is revisiting his original band, Dub War, for *Westgate Under Fire* – their first new album in 26 years. *Hammer* took the opportunity to stroll down memory lane with Benji, to find out what he's learned so far.

DON'T TAKE HAVING LOVED ONES AROUND YOU FOR GRANTED

"I lost my folks early. I was the youngest of four kids and grew up in a stable home as far as I can remember. A loving mother and father: she was from Cardiff, he came over from the West Indies in the 50s. But when I was seven my mother passed away. My father passed when I was 11; then I was raised by my ganja-smoking Rastafarian 21-year-old brother."

YOU'RE MORE RESILIENT THAN YOU THINK YOU ARE

"My brother was in a rock band, so he wasn't always around because he'd go off on tours. They packed into this little hire van and would leave on a Thursday and come back Monday. I was pretty feral as a kid, but realised I could fend for myself."

THE ROCK'N'ROLL LIFESTYLE APPEALED TO ME

"My brother invited me along to one of his shows and I went in the van. We got out and all these people were coming up to him and shaking his hand. Girls came up and were treating him really well. At the end of the night, I knew that was what I wanted to do; they were getting paid and were treated like royalty."

MY FIRST AUDIENCE WAS A CLASSROOM

"I was really good at impersonating people – I'd be singing *West Side Story* or whatever, which was a musical my mother loved. I knew I could hold a tune and win audiences from an early age because teachers would tell me how good I was. But because I was so feral, I never took the advantages I could have."

DIVERSITY KEEPS THINGS INTERESTING

"I lived in quite a white area of Newport, but there were some places that were more predominantly mixed-race communities. I went down to the docks and there were so many different types of people – West Indian black, African black, Caribbean black, Indian... I felt at home there. It was great for music, too, because it was a real melting pot of styles."

THE MUSIC I MAKE IS A COLLAGE OF MY MIND

"I love reggae, but I also love metal. I couldn't choose between them! I want my Bob Marley in with my AC/DC, so I couldn't just sing in a reggae band or just metal because that's not

my character. I first saw The Specials on a BBC documentary, this thing about Coventry and ska, and there were these black and white musicians playing together. I recognised some of the songs from my father's record collection, but here they were bringing everybody together no matter what colour they were."

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

"I moved to Florida for five years and I really missed Newport. There's a community spirit here that I just love. That community spirit is



LIFE LESSONS

BENJI WEBBE

The Skindred/Dub War vocalist shares the lessons that took him from life as a feral kid on the streets of Newport to one of metal's most brilliantly exuberant frontmen

WORDS: RICH HOBSON • PICTURES: PAUL HARRIES

"I WAS RAISED BY MY GANJA-SMOKING RASTAFARIAN 21-YEAR-OLD BROTHER"

what made me want to sing – whether it was in Dub War or Skindred, my mission statement has always been to bring people together."

I'M PROUD TO REPRESENT BRITISH METAL

"I was hanging out with Robert Trujillo at Download 2006 and [Korn bassist] Fieldy comes up to say Jonathan Davis is sick, and they need vocalists. Robert points to me and says, 'Here's your man.' We agreed to meet at five o'clock and we'd go on to sing those songs. I spent the hour before in my little van sweating my bollocks off, frantically memorising the words to *A.D.I.D.A.S.* There were loads of us in the end – but what blessed me the most was that I was stood in this backstage area with all these vocalists, but I was the only British guy there."

TRUST IN YOUR ABILITIES

"My parents died a long time ago, but when I got to the chorus of *A.D.I.D.A.S.* at Download, I really expected my mother to wake me up for school! Ha ha! It was a dream come true – I'm a massive fan and I'm up there with these legendary singers. Fieldy said, 'Can you sing two songs?' And I was like, 'Fuck no, I'll do one and be pelted with bottles of piss!' But after I came off, I wish I had. I could have sung *Twist* as well."

YOU NEVER KNOW HOW THINGS WILL WORK OUT

"After Dub War ran its course, I knew I wanted to try something new. I knew Earache weren't going to pick up a solo hip hop album, but I did it anyway. They didn't dig it and it was like, 'Thank fuck for that!' because I moved on and did Skindred."

STAY OUT OF OTHER PEOPLE'S ARGUMENTS

"I saw these two girls arguing in the street – they were drunk and looked a bit high, so I should have shut my fucking mouth. But as I wandered past I said, 'Hey ladies, get a room!' One of the girls got right up in my face, spitting kebab all over me. I pushed her away and she came back at me swinging, but I thought she'd just slapped me. Next thing I know, my girlfriend was holding my neck and blood was squirting out like *The Exorcist* – I didn't even realise I'd been glassed. At the hospital they said if it had been an inch over it would have caught a vein and I would have bled out in seconds."

IT TAKES A BIG PERSON TO APOLOGISE

"About a year ago I was shopping in Primark, of all places, and this girl came up and said, 'I'm so sorry.' My sister had passed away a few months before, so I thought she was talking about her. But she said, 'I learned so much in prison and I've really calmed down now.' Then I realised – it wasn't someone wishing me condolences, it was the girl who cut me. ▶

From *West Side Story* to Skindred: Benji's music has come a long way



Just don't ask this man to choose between Bob Marley and AC/DC...



I thought about it later and was so impressed. She had no idea how I'd react when she came up – I could have punched her in the face! So I said, 'I commend you for coming up and apologising – if you have learned something, that's incredible. And I forgive you.'

FITNESS IS CRUCIAL

'I never realised the cross trainer, this electrical machine, could be such a good friend. I spend an hour with it five days a week and I love it, it loves me. If I hadn't worked out, you'd have had to roll me onstage every night. I'd have been the Barry White of heavy metal!'

WE TAKE OUR JOBS SERIOUSLY

'We got this call from Live Nation telling us they were going to do a Pilot event [with Download] and I was so ecstatic. I trained like a motherfucker – I even had to watch YouTube just to figure out how we used to do it, because during the pandemic that had all gone away. I was just the guy who makes [my girlfriend] Julie sandwiches for two years.'

OUR COMEBACK SHOW WAS THE MOST EMOTIONAL SHOW WE'VE EVER PLAYED

'Our manager had a heart attack the night before we played Download Pilot. Our drummer Arya [Goggin] spent 40 minutes banging on his chest with CPR and whatever,

then he was carted off by paramedics. This is someone who I've known for years, he's basically family. So I sat there in shock. They asked if we wanted to pull the Pilot show, but I knew for a fact there was no way on this planet he would have wanted us to pull that show. We rocked harder and took all our energy, pain and frustration out on that stage. Then when we got offstage, we found out he'd pulled through – that's incredible.'

NEVER MISS AN OPPORTUNITY

'When the pandemic first hit it was like, 'Well, what can we do now?' And then I realised all my friends in bands weren't on tour right now. So I reached out to the guys I knew who loved Dub War to see if they'd do some stuff for the album, which is how we got Roy Mayorga, Mike Bordin and all those other brilliant guys for the record. They all went out of their way to find studios during the pandemic to send us the tracks, which means that *Westgate Under Fire* is something everybody involved is truly passionate about.'

"I WAS GLASSED. MY GIRLFRIEND WAS HOLDING MY NECK AND BLOOD WAS SQUIRTING OUT"

YOU SHOULD ALWAYS BE JUDGED ON WHO YOU ARE, NOT WHAT YOU ARE

'I've had people come to me and tell me that they've been called 'n***er' at Skindred shows. What the fuck is that? I'm not a political person, because I think it's all bullshit, but I do get angry about people treating each other differently because of the colour of their skin. That's fucking disgusting, whether you're black, white or whatever else. That's what the song *Blackkk Man* on the new Dub War album is about – 'No one chooses the skin they're in/but the skin you're in, it makes you win.' It doesn't matter if you're disabled, LGBT+ or anything else – you shouldn't be judged for what you are, but who you are.' **H**

DUB WAR'S WESTGATE UNDER FIRE IS OUT NOW VIA EARACHE. SKINDRED TOUR THE UK IN DECEMBER WITH VOLBEAT

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THE STORY BEHIND A CERTAIN SHADE OF GREEN INCUBUS

A Certain Shade Of Green introduced Incubus to a generation, but even though they toured with Korn and Limp Bizkit and had hip hop influences, singer Brandon Boyd isn't having it when people call them 'nu metal'

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

PINPOINTING EXACTLY

WHEN nu metal went from being a couple of unique bands in the metal scene to a fully fledged musical movement is tough. Looking back, 1997 seems to have a pretty good claim for being considered year zero for nu metal as a legitimate scene: it was the year we got debut albums from Coal Chamber, Sevendust, (Hed)pe, Limp Bizkit, Snot and more. It saw the release of Deftones' classic *Around The Fur*, and Taproot, American Head Charge and Soil all formed.

It was certainly a boom period for metal, with almost every emerging artist leaning into this new sound. But one band that year who ended up being lumped in with this new movement seemed to bring much more to the party than their peers – so much so, that their place in nu metal always felt a little forced. In 1997, alt funk metallers Incubus began setting themselves apart from the pack with the release of their breakthrough album *S.C.I.E.N.C.E.*, and with it a song that would be their first to connect on a greater level: *A Certain Shade Of Green*.

Formed in 1991, the Calabasas, California quartet had self-released their debut album, *Fungus Amongus*, in 1995 and decided to take their unique fusion of funk, metal and hip hop to as many people as they could.

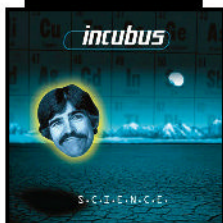
THE FACTS

RELEASED:
1997

ALBUM:
S.C.I.E.N.C.E.

PERSONNEL:
Brandon Boyd (vocals), Mike Einziger (guitars), Alex Katunich (bass), José Pasillas (drums), DJ Lyfe (turntables/keyboards)

HIGHEST CHART POSITION:
N/A



"We'd play anywhere, wherever would have us," frontman Brandon Boyd tells us today, when we ask for recollections of his band's early years. "We played bars, backyards, living rooms, opened up for other bands... We opened for a lot of other bands!"

This enthusiasm to play wherever they could, and the ever-increasing interest in metal's new sonic palette, brought Incubus to the attention of Paul Pontius, who had signed Korn to Sony subsidiary Immortal/Epic Records. He added the band to the label's roster. Epic's first decision was not to get the band into the studio, but to keep them on the road to hone their craft even further.

"We'd only done some intermittent touring," says Brandon. "It was the first time we had a budget and we had a little bit of cash, so we could update our gear, rent a van – it was a 15-person van with a trailer. We basically got in that van and stayed in it for about two years."

One of the first tours that Incubus did prior to the release of *S.C.I.E.N.C.E.* was supporting Korn in Europe in early 1997. With the headliners riding high on the success of their second album, *Life Is Peachy*, it was a huge opportunity for Incubus to make an impression.

"We did a two-month run with them," Brandon remembers. "It never



Incubus (left to right): Mike Einziger, Chris Kilmore, Brandon Boyd, Alex Katunich, José Pasillas

felt like anyone was trying to hold us back – it felt like we had support. They would see us going to our van, sometimes limping to the show as the van coughed its way to the parking lot. We weren't necessarily supposed to partake in the catering, but they would see us show up malnourished and under-slept and be like, 'Have you eaten?' We'd say, 'Nuh-huh.' And they'd order: 'Go get some food!'

"We weren't supposed to even get a dressing room... They'd give us a dressing room. Stuff like that sticks with me a lot. So much of the music from that era was so heavy and macho and sometimes even negative, and you get it in your head that these guys would be mean and unsupportive. But it was exactly the opposite."

While on the tour, Incubus began to try out the new material from their



forthcoming major label debut, and it was here that they began to notice one song stand out.

"All we had were the songs from S.C.I.E.N.C.E. and we had a 30-minute set, so we were only playing those songs," smiles Brandon. "But the first time a large audience were dancing in unison to a song they didn't know, it was *A Certain Shade Of Green* in Paris. It was the same reaction every night."

Buoyed by the reaction from Korn fans, Incubus headed into the studio to capture these new songs. Nu metal was now the hottest style in alternative music, and even though he concedes there are similarities between his band and the movement, Brandon is quick to distance himself from the genre.

"We weren't trying to fit into a particular niche at a particular time," he sighs. "We were just kids being influenced by a small handful of bands that we grew up with. Just to name a few we were collectively obsessed with: Primus, Red Hot Chili Peppers,

Mr. Bungle, Pearl Jam, Alice In Chains, Firehose... some other obscure bands we were discovering because of going to shows."

Despite this, Incubus weren't making any deliberate attempt to consciously move away from nu metal. "It's much more sincere in the way we write an

"WE HAD A LOT OF PISS AND VINEGAR AND VENOM, AS YOU DO WHEN YOU'RE 19 OR 20 YEARS OLD"

BRANDON BOYD

album," says Brandon. "I always want to speak as authentically as possible as a writer and a singer."

Instead, S.C.I.E.N.C.E. was a reflection of the genuine excitement the band felt about getting creative in a proper studio for the first time in their career.

"It was really exciting for us to be making a real album for the first time, with a budget," Brandon says excitedly. "We had more toys than ever before. Kid in a candy store? It was like our dad owned the candy store and we were just gorging ourselves on sugar for a couple of months! I remember being really excited to turn up and see what new sounds we could make. We were young, late teenagers: I was 19 when that record came out. We had a lot of piss and vinegar and venom, as you do when you're 19 or 20 years old – almost limitless energy."

"Limitless energy" isn't a bad way to describe the song that introduced Incubus to an entire generation of metal fans. *A Certain Shade...* rides along on a savage riff from guitarist Mike Einziger; some popping, propulsive hip hop grooves; all manner of manic scratches from the newly installed DJ Lyfe; and a brilliantly rapped, sung and screamed performance from Brandon. Twenty-five years down the line, it still sounds like the standout moment ▶

Green team: what are they waiting for?



from an album that has aged far better than many of those from their nu metal peers.

"I haven't been as involved with the choosing of the singles," says Brandon. "They're all my children, so picking one over the other would be me being a shitty parent. I like to offload those choices to people who have expertise in this area. I'm sure the label heard that track on an album that's mostly barking, with crazy weird rhythms and riffs, and it was the closest thing to a single they could find. It's not a single-heavy album."

The song didn't chart, but Incubus relentlessly toured over the next couple of years, with the likes of 311, Limp Bizkit, Far and more, getting progressively better as a live band. *A Certain Shade Of Green* was the standout track of their live show, the band often dropping it in early during support slots to really grab the attention and get, as Brandon describes it, "a big visceral reaction". The tactic worked, and the song and the album grew organically, eventually being certified Gold on both sides of

the Atlantic.

Brandon is rightly proud of the hard work his band put in during that era.

"Although there wasn't an obvious single on *S.C.I.E.N.C.E.*

there was an energy that was captured, and it was best encapsulated by seeing us live," Brandon explains. "What we were able to take away from that was that we got those 10,000 hours in, so when we came to write [1999's follow-up and mainstream-smash album] *Make Yourself*, we were wise beyond our years."

Both nu metal and Incubus would get considerably larger in the years that followed, though the two would travel in different directions. But a quarter of a century later, their odd, brief union is still a period beloved by many fans.

"Twenty-five years is more than enough time for something to define itself," Brandon says, puffing out his cheeks when we ask him about the legacy of *A Certain Shade Of Green*.

"BEING CALLED 'NU METAL' HURT MY FEELINGS"

BRANDON BOYD

"But being one of the guys who crafted the thing, I feel like I'm a little too close to it to understand the legacy in a historical sense."

As for the legacy of nu metal? Brandon is a little clearer on that.

"I thought it was terrible. I didn't like it. Honestly, I thought it was stupid," he smiles. "I know a lot of people love it, but being called 'nu metal' kinda hurt my feelings. If we made one record that fits into that genre, then so be it, but I never heard it in our music myself."

They may have been there for the birth, but *A Certain Shade Of Green* showed us all that Incubus were their own band, destined to walk their own, unique path. **H**

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YOUR SHOUT

DURAN DURAN? DISGRACEFUL!

...and other sweeping dismissals, generalisations and disturbingly detailed musings you had on Machine Head, Parkway Drive and Joseph Quinn appearing in last month's issue of *Metal Hammer*

MACHINE FUCKING YES

I'd written Machine Head off after *Unto The Locust*, but seeing them at Bloodstock made me remember just how much I loved that band. Barely a week later and they're on the cover of *Hammer* and now I'm actually excited about the new album. Fair play – your marketing team deserve a raise.

Lauren Johnson, email

Er, yes... exactly as we planned. It's not like we were surprised by their Bloodstock appearance or anything... *ahem*.

EPIC-EH

Glad that Machine Head are evolving and doing well. But to me, they lost what made them special after they did *The Blackening*. None of their material after that appealed to me. They sound so... manufactured, overly epic and by the numbers now. Including terrible overproduction and stage clothing. It's not the band I once loved anymore

Rainer Stahl, Facebook

Admittedly, Machine Head's output since *The Blackening* has been... inconsistent, but we're not sure what you mean by 'overly epic', Rainer! How can something be *too* epic?!

RAGING BULL

Birmingham hosts the Commonwealth Games and has a massive Olympics-style opening ceremony with a gigantic bull... but not one mention of the city's metal history. Tony Iommi was literally there and shunted off to a 30-second clip with some fucking ballerinas. But Duran Duran get to play a full set? Disgraceful.

Alan Lowe, email

Ah, but they were waiting for the epic closing ceremony, eh Alan! It was great seeing Ozzy and Tony play live again, and Judas Priest got their dues too.

KNOB FLYNN

Robb Flynn stares into his own eyes in the bathroom mirror while he jerks off. This guy's ego is immeasurably big. Maybe try taking yourself a little less seriously and just get back to playing quality music, Robb?

Dave Dippenaar, Facebook

We're a little worried about how much thought you put into that description, Dave.

JOSEPH WIN

I don't really understand these people complaining about *Metal Hammer* running a piece with Joseph Quinn – the guy has done more for metal in pop culture than some bands have in the past 20 years. Plus, he looks like Jason Newsted! More metalhead actors, please!

Emma Hunter, email

Robb Flynn: no, this is not a shot of him in front of the bathroom mirror

#TWEETS

Just blew out a candle and hot wax splashed on my face. It's fine, I don't use my top lip much anyhow.

Nick Holmes,
Paradise Lost/
Bloodbath
(@NickHolmesPL)

Half of life is incredible, chef's kiss, mwah mwah and the other is absolute fuckin mayhem.

I'm worn out
Debbie Gough, Heriot
(@debbiegoughh)

@TonyIommi, I was really proud to see you at the opening of the Commonwealth Games in our home town of Birmingham

Ozzy Osbourne
(@OzzyOsbourne)

Songwriters or artists? Where do you get your most impromptu inspiration from?

Mine is Public Restrooms
Lzzy Hale
(@LZZYHALE)

People to get in the sea: Racists, sexists, homophobes, transphobes and those who spend a whole eleven-hour flight violently blowing their nose, picking the bogeys out of the tissue and then eating them

Chris Catalyst,
Eureka Machines
(@ChrisCatalyst)

Eddie Munson: one of us



Exactly, Emma! As *Stranger Things*' Eddie Munson, Joseph Quinn has helped inspire a whole wave of interest in heavy metal – plus the guy has kickass music taste, so we're not going to turn our backs on exploring how heavy metal is infiltrating the mainstream!

METAL HEALTH

The Parkway Drive feature you guys ran in the latest issue got me emotional. We have lots of bands singing about mental health now, but you could really feel the struggle that band had been through. Was a bit sad it wasn't longer, honestly! Amazing story though, and props to them for not just saying 'Oh, we're better now' – it's a process and they're clearly building back up.

Conor Wood, Facebook

We're glad you enjoyed, Conor! We absolutely agree that Stephen Hill did a stellar job with that feature and you can rest assured, we'll definitely explore more with

Winston – and the other Parkway boys – in future.

HAIL HEILUNG

So happy to see stuff like Heilung pop up in *Metal Hammer*. I know some folks don't think it's very metal, but so many metalheads love Nordic folk and that stuff has inspired so much of heavy metal culture.

Aziz, Twitter

We couldn't have put it better, Aziz!

WHINE GUARDIAN

So suddenly *Metal Hammer* is bashing Blind Guardian's AMAZING orchestral album? That feature is trash – next time get somebody who actually likes the band to write it!

John Bull, Facebook

We hate to say it, but it was Blind Guardian themselves that were bashing the orchestral stuff, John! Considering only one of the members actually played on it, you can't blame them for wanting to get back to making music together!

THE BIG DEBATE

Metallica are back in the mainstream in a big way thanks to *Stranger Things*, but it wasn't long before someone suggested the band should be cancelled...

WE SAID

"Alongside this new outpouring of fandom, however, a spotlight has been shone on Metallica's past, which has led some of the TikTok community to draw attention to historical incidents where allegations of problematic behaviour were levelled at the band."

YOU SAY

Why do we listen or care about what whiny people on TikTok are trying to cancel? She obviously knows nothing of Metallica.

Shannon Flores, Facebook

Metal fans have been trying to cancel Metallica since 1989 (and failing). These kids have no chance.

Paul G, Twitter

Wait 'til they hear about Slayer.

Justin Stewart, Facebook

Lol Metallica was "cancelled" in my mind during the Napster shit. I put all my old cassettes and CDs in a barrel and burned 'em 22 years ago.

Hematemesis, Twitter

I say we cancel fucking TikTok and everyone that uses it.

Phil Haddix, Facebook

Good luck, TikTok. They failed with Eminem and will fail with this one.

Jessica Sweet, Twitter

They've sold over 125 million albums. I think it may be a bit late to "cancel" Metallica.

Ali-Nicole Thurston, Facebook

JOIN THE BIG DEBATE AT FACEBOOK.COM/ GROUPS/METALHAMMERREADERS

HAMMER STEREO

What's been blowing our office speakers



SIPKNOT

The End, So Far
"A welcome curveball that still brings the pain"

ELEANOR GOODMAN
EDITOR



GAEREA

Mirage
"An incendiary, heart-in-mouth act of deliverance"

JONATHAN SELZER
REVIEWS EDITOR



A.A. WILLIAMS

As The Moon Rests
"Stunning. Simply stunning. It's been on loop"

VANESSA THORPE
PRODUCTION EDITOR



SIPKNOT

The End, So Far
"Here we go again!"

LOUISE BROCK
ART EDITOR



A.A. WILLIAMS

As The Moon Rests
"A bewitching ocean of melancholic melodies"

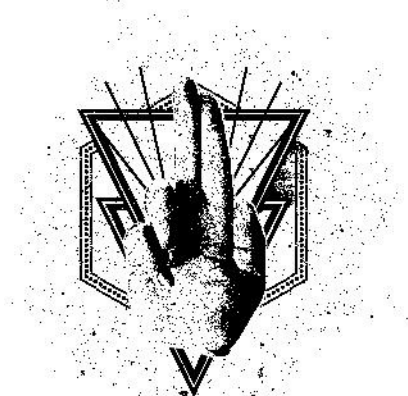
RICH HOBSON
STAFF WRITER



DEVIN TOWNSEND

Lightwork
"Prog metal's mad scientist goes pop. Well, his version of 'pop' anyway"

DAVE EVERLEY
ASSOCIATE EDITOR



NEW NOISE

HARPER

The 10-year-old from Somerset has gone from wowing America's Got Talent to leading the charge for the next generation

WORDS: HANNAH MAY KILROY

HARPER IS REMEMBERING

when she appeared on *America's Got Talent* in June. The 10-year-old from Somerset arrived on stage in a flowery black dress, only to shock the judges and audience by launching into a full-on rendition – complete with screams – of Spiritbox's *Holy Roller*.

"Simon [Cowell, one of the judges] asked if I had ever seen *The Exorcist*!" Harper says with a laugh, speaking to *Hammer* today via Zoom from her home, with her stepdad Ben Lumber by her side. "I was like... 'What's that?' So now I want to watch it!"

The response from the judges was unanimous – a resounding yes from all three (Simon, Heidi Klum and Sofia Vergara), although they were a little flabbergasted by the whole thing. "That was brilliant. It was like a mouse turning into a vampire bat or something," Simon said of the performance, while Sofia added: "And it was so effortless. Something coming out of her that was so crazy."

"I was so nervous," Harper says. "When I was younger I used to watch *America's Got Talent* and think, 'I really wanna go on that.' I didn't have a talent, but then I got *this* talent!"

The video of her on the show has now had more than two million views on YouTube. Though *America's Got Talent* made her a global sensation, Harper was already known to much of the metal community for her YouTube cover videos. She started last year, tackling songs like Architects' *Nihilist*, Emmure's *Smokey* and, of course, *Holy Roller*, which now sits at almost 250k views. She now has over 10k followers on YouTube, a blue tick on Instagram and people have made reaction videos to her songs – unable to believe that a child could scream like that.

"Most of them are being nice!" she says with a laugh. "It felt amazing that I'd get reaction videos to my songs. I never thought that would happen."

Harper discovered her mighty voice by screaming along to Ben's songs – he's in the metal band Acres. "When his new songs came out, I would shout along, so that was like a practice for me," she says. "Then we started trying other songs. It was just a bit of fun. I was thinking, 'How did I do that?'"

Harper namechecks Currents, Metallica, Olivia Rodrigo and of course, Spiritbox as some of her favourite musicians. And she couldn't believe it

"SIMON COWELL ASKED IF I'D SEEN THE EXORCIST"

HARPER

when Courtney LaPlante herself, the vocalist of Spiritbox, saw her cover of *Holy Roller* and asked her to perform it with them onstage. Harper did so in London in June, the same night that *America's Got Talent* aired.

"Imagine meeting your biggest hero – that's how it felt!" Harper says. "When I got onstage, I definitely had more energy than on *America's Got Talent*. You could see it. I think it was because the band and Courtney were there, and they hyped me up."

But she says that the most exciting part was the audience. "I loved the crowd so much!" Harper exclaims. "The people there knew this kind of music and wouldn't hate on me. There was one girl in the front who was so sweet, saying, 'Go Harper, go!' I nearly teared up onstage."

Now Harper is becoming a star in her own right. She's signed to a label (Pale Chord in partnership with Rise Records, Spiritbox's own label) – "It's mind-blowing how a 10-year-old got a record deal," Harper says, still in awe – and has just released a single, *Falling*. It's a rousing metalcore anthem that Harper says is a response to her critics.

"It's mostly about haters who say that my songs aren't real," she says, adding that her stepdad wrote the lyrics. "Some people have said [my screaming] isn't real, that I'm just shouting and Ben's editing it."

Any doubters have been silenced by now. To help keep her incredible pipes in check, Harper has lessons with Melissa Cross – the legendary vocal coach who specialises in screaming, with a client list including Slipknot, Lamb Of God and Trivium. Since *Hammer* spoke to Harper, it was announced that she will be back in the USA to appear on the next round of *America's Got Talent* in August. And she's working on her next single, with more input this time: "The new song is even more like me."

You have to wonder how all this fits in with a kid's schedule, but Harper is taking it in her stride. "My friends didn't even know [about all this] until I told them!" she laughs. And as for dealing with any unwanted attention, she has a technique.

"We have a high school nearby, and when I walk past they all ask, 'Are you Harper?' I'm like, 'No! Who's Harper? My name's not Harper!' It's weird [being recognised]."

She might not be able to fool them for much longer. **H**

FALLING IS OUT NOW VIA PALE CHORD/RISE

Young lungs: Harper's screams
blew the judges' minds on
America's Got Talent



IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Punchy modern
metal with
youthful zeal

FOR FANS OF:
Spiritbox,
Currents,
Code Orange

LISTEN TO:
Falling



NEW NOISE

GRIEF RITUAL

Death metalcore brutes relish putting the boot into Tory Britain

WORDS: MATT MILLS • PICTURES: ADAM CHANDLER



THE UK IS going to shit and Grief Ritual know it. “The last couple of years, with the current Tory party, everything that’s been going on has been disgusting,” says the metalcore trio’s singer and lyricist, Jamie Waggett. “They’ve been trying to change the Human Rights Act and it feels like they’re dragging us back to the 1800s.”

On their new EP, *Spiritual Disease*, the Midlands rage against the machine louder and more heavily than 99% of their genre peers. For example, the third song, *Telluric*, seethes over the underfunding of the NHS. “For a mental health diagnosis, you go to your GP and they’ll be like, ‘OK, we’ll put you on a list,’” Jamie says. “And maybe in six months or a year, someone will speak to you. By that time, your whole life could have fallen apart. You might not even be around any more.”

“The Tory party have continually cut the NHS budget over the years while saying, ‘Oh no, we’re building new hospitals and hiring new doctors.’”

Meanwhile, *Atrophy* is equal parts a story of personal burnout and a rallying cry against employers that work you to the bone while barely

paying you. Jamie explains: “It was inspired by when I worked in visual merchandising at H&M. That job should have been split among three people. I was working from 6am to 6pm most days, yet I was earning just above the minimum wage.”

Spiritual Disease screams its frustrations with the modern world through a loudspeaker of death metal and hardcore. The bludgeoning breakdowns are

interspersed with Entombed-esque tremolo picking and low, guttural roars. It’s a fusion that’s already seen the band play 2000trees and support Ithaca on tour. One thing’s certain: there’ll be no more long days in shops for Jamie. “I used to ruin myself working ridiculous hours,” he says, “and now I’m looking back going, ‘What was I doing with my life?’”

SPIRITUAL DISEASE IS OUT NOW

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:

An army of death metal and hardcore musicians using breakdowns to flatten the bullshit of the Tories

FOR FANS OF:

Napalm Death, Leeches, Entombed

LISTEN TO:

Immurement



STATE OF YOU

Meet the UK’s answer to Every Time I Die and Cancer Bats

WORDS: MATT MILLS • PICTURES: JON FRASER

“THIS IS BRITISH rock’n’roll!” State Of You vocalist Steve Sitkowski howls during *The Perfect Storm*, the fourth song on the band’s self-titled debut EP. “We’re very fucking proud to be British,” the frontman tells *Hammer*, “but it’s also hilarious, because we don’t even sound British.”

They really don’t. Instead, this five-piece are a mix of ETID and the hardest party you’ve ever been to. Thematically, the EP is a snapshot of life in 2022. *Lies* was inspired by the Russia-Ukraine conflict and *The Perfect Storm* is about Steve’s ADHD, long undiagnosed by an underfunded NHS.

“I got diagnosed as manic depressive when I was 21, which I knew was wrong,” he remembers. “My energy was going up and down. On tour, I’d put everything I could into a show and feel on top of the world. The next day I couldn’t get the words out to buy cigarettes.”

It was an online quiz that confirmed what was wrong, and Steve’s now three years deep in the correct treatment, wanting his music to connect with people as misunderstood as he was. “We want to create an environment where everyone’s welcome,” he says.

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:

Rock’n’roll-flecked hardcore out to start the world’s most savage party

FOR FANS OF:

Every Time I Die, Cancer Bats, Wilson

LISTEN TO:

Run

STATE OF YOU IS OUT NOW VIA SILENT CULT

GOZER

Sheffield metallers exorcise their demons in tectonic, sludgy fashion

WORDS: WILL MARSHALL • PICTURES: NATALIE HEALD

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE: Hulking, cathartic post-metal

FOR FANS OF: Isis, Neurosis, Cult Of Luna

LISTEN TO: *Augur*

GOZER HAVE SEEN their fair share of hardship. Growing up in the Steel City, Sheffield, they saw first-hand the devastation wrought in the Thatcher years as factories were shut down, impacting not just livelihoods but people's mental health. Their debut album, *An Endless Static*, reflects this, its title a reference to an ever-present struggle. "Speaking from my personal experience, it's something that you never get rid of," drummer TJ Fairfax explains. "That static is always in the background: sometimes in the back of your brain, sometimes in the front."

From the roiling *Into The Grey* to monolithic closer *Wintercearig*, *An Endless Static* takes its time to explore every nook and cranny of despair, rage and defeatism at a world where a self-appointed elite crush the working class



underfoot, fusing the "punch and drive" of heavy machinery with the seismic post-metal of Isis or Cult Of Luna.

It's not all grim, however. Acting as a form of shared catharsis, Gozer sought to expel their demons and brought in friends to collaborate: Tom Wright of Hundred Year Old Man lends synth and French horn to the desolate soundscapes of *A Fading Light*, while the grinding, pummelling *Desiderium*

features guest vocals from Simon Mason of Torpor.

"It's about sharing the load," TJ says, before vocalist Keiran Sockett explains further: "It can feel like you're the only one suffering. There's not enough willingness to share in something so personal... it's everyone's struggle." **H**

AN ENDLESS STATIC IS OUT NOW VIA TREPANATION RECORDINGS



AN ABSTRACT ILLUSION

Woe betide anyone who doesn't explore what these genre-splicing mavericks have to offer

WORDS: ALEX DELLER • PICTURES: JENNIFER KRISTIANSSON

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE: Progressive death metal unafraid to explore veins of jazz, electronica, folk and classical

FOR FANS OF: Epiphanic Truth, Opeth, Omnium Gatherum

LISTEN TO: *This Torment Has No End, Only New Beginnings*

SIX YEARS BETWEEN albums is quite a stretch, and it'd be easy to assume that the prog-death ambitions of *Woe*, An Abstract Illusion's second record, required painstaking perfectionism. Instead, it was just a case of life being busy. "We recorded the drums back in 2017," says guitarist/bassist Karl Westerlund. "Since then, it's been a whole host of things like moving abroad to Iceland, Namibia and Crete, and finishing university."

Woe is an incredible feat for a band that started as teens jamming Cannibal Corpse covers: the members now draw from jazz and electronica, using cellos, clarinets and even the odd bassoon.

"It's important to have different viewpoints," says Karl. "If all you ever listen to is Slayer, you'll just sound like a watered-down version of Slayer."

Thematically, things are similarly lofty. "The largest influences were the horrors of reality," says vocalist Christian Berglönn.

Despite the, um, woe, do the guys foresee better days ahead? "There are plenty of reasons to be optimistic for the future, and plenty not to be," concludes Karl. "One thing's for sure: you must never stop fighting for it." **H**

WOE IS OUT NOW VIA WILLOWTIP

IN THE KNOW

What your favourite bands are listening to

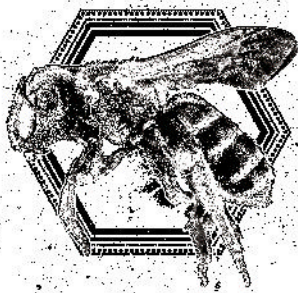


FIRE FROM THE GODS

"I'M A BIG fan of Fire From The Gods – they're an American band with a very eclectic approach. We've taken them out on the road a few times. They bring in new influences to make a different sound – there's even a bit of reggae in there without sounding weird or forced. [Singer] AJ Channer's dad is Jamaican, so it's part of his culture, and he brings it in brilliantly."

ZOLTAN BATHORY, FIVE FINGER DEATH PUNCH





HOARD ALMIGHTY

Box sets, underground oddities and all the essential merch you need this month



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Motörhead's fifth album was a landmark in that it would prove to be the last featuring the classic line-up, with 'Fast' Eddie Clarke leaving soon after it was recorded. If Eddie's own production caught some criticism for sounding too clean, it was still the mark of a band remaining at the height of their songwriting powers while also determined to push their sound forward. To celebrate its 40th anniversary, the band's official store are reissuing it in various editions – but this is the daddy of them all. It features the album itself on limited-edition blue/black swirl vinyl, along with three more vinyls in mediabook format featuring a remastered version, plus live and demo tracks and the lot on CD, too. There's also extra merch galore – two t-shirts, a long-sleeve and a hoodie, all reaffirming that this is the one religion you *do* need.

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MEGADETH T-SHIRT

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tinyurl.com/sick-tee



WAR HORSE SILVER RING

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Gather round young warriors now, and prepare your digits for war with this armour-plated stallion: the first in a series of chunky made-to-order rings from Hand Ov Glory, based on the four steeds of the apocalypse.

tinyurl.com/war-ring



GOth PILLOWS

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Turn your boudoir into a dank mausoleum by fluffing up a pair of these cheerful pillows. Perfect for laying down your weary head as you drift off to sleep, imagining the cold embrace of Peter Steele's pale, muscular arms.

tinyurl.com/goth-comfort



I SCREAM TOP

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Lack of air-con grinding you down? Why not air out those overheated pits with this smart top, which comes emblazoned with a three-scoop skull cone. Can we have a Flake with ours?

tinyurl.com/skull-candy



SANDMAN T-SHIRT

£22

So you've enjoyed seeing Tom Sturridge pout his way through the Netflix series and then chomped through Neil Gaiman's original *Sandman* graphic novels. How's about one of these Morpheus-sporting shirts to celebrate?

tinyurl.com/dream-tee



NIDROSIAN BLACK METAL BOOK

£30

From scene shaker-uppers Thorns, through to the ever-morphing Manes, to sublime masters Vemod and ne'er-do-wells One Tail, One Head, the city of Trondheim has always been black metal's third rail. Investigate and celebrate with this mighty grimoire!

tinyurl.com/trondheim-tome



HALFORD POP! VINYL

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Behold! One of metal's true kings, rendered immortal in plastic. Clad in studded kecks and wielding his trusty whip, he gazes implacably down upon you. Do his shades conceal mirth, pride or contempt at your petty human shenanigans?

tinyurl.com/rob-pop



GAEREA BACKPATCH

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Portugal's mysterious Gaerea balance black metal savagery with metaphysical ruminations like few others. Stitch this to your favourite denim jacket, tie a black t-shirt round your face and prepare to feel their dark magic course through you.

tinyurl.com/gaerea-patch



ALCHEMICAL PRINT

£10

We can't promise that it'll help you turn lead into gold, but this esoteric alchemy-themed print will look darn fine in your bedroom, kitchen or downstairs loo – wherever the magick happens, basically.

tinyurl.com/mystic-print



LORNA SHORE SIGIL PATCH

£4.99

Runes, sigils and hexes are all the rage right now, so why not spruce up your shirt, shorts or battle jacket with this subtle, you-know-if-you-know patch from these New Jersey deathcore types?

tinyurl.com/lorna-patch



SLIPKNOT SHIRT

£23.99

With *The End, So Far* Slipknot now have an album for each of the deadly sins. To mark the occasion, why not treat yourself to yet another black t-shirt featuring their album art? You can never have too many, after all.

tinyurl.com/knot-tee

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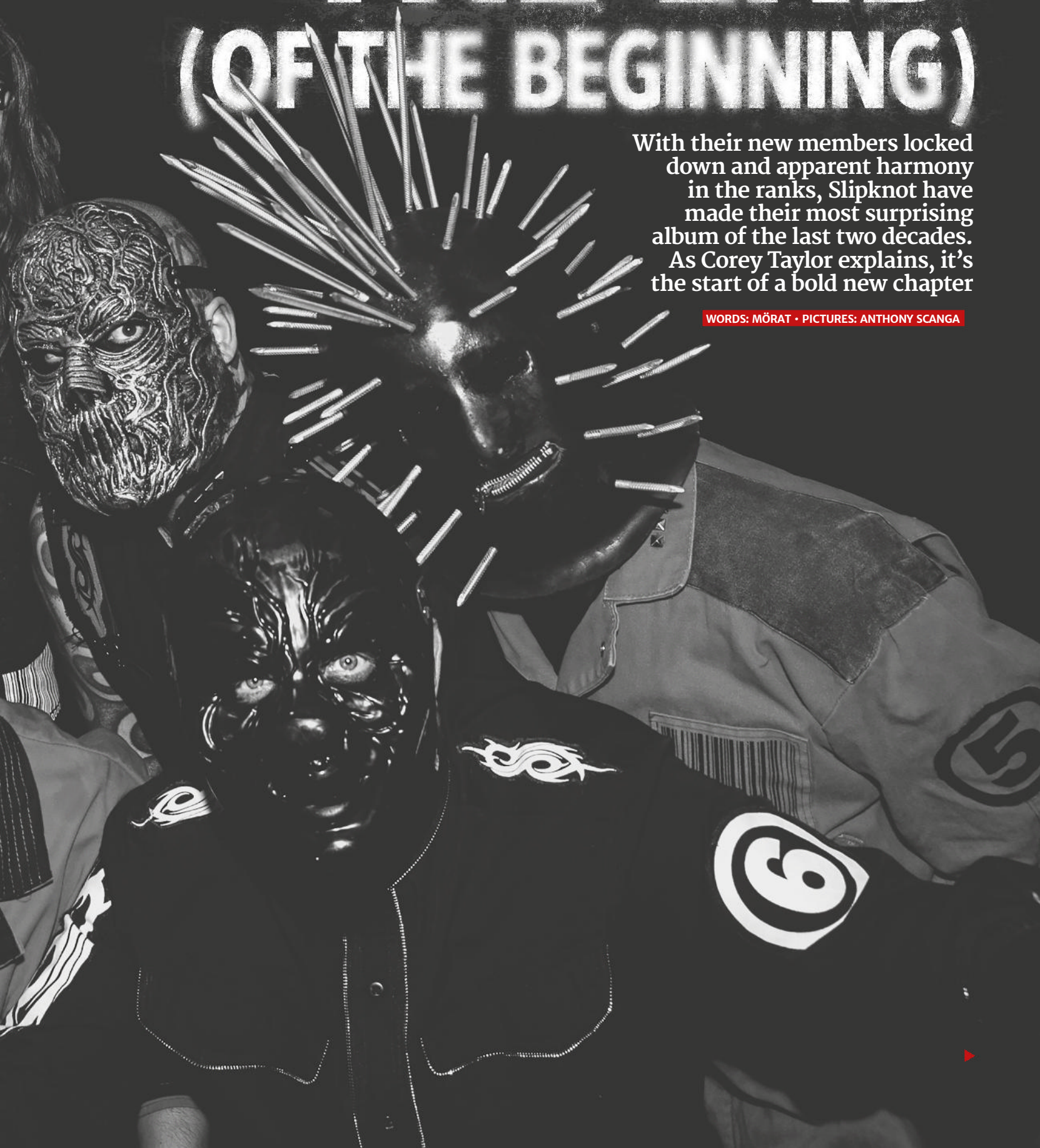
SLIPKNOT



THE END (OF THE BEGINNING)

With their new members locked down and apparent harmony in the ranks, Slipknot have made their most surprising album of the last two decades. As Corey Taylor explains, it's the start of a bold new chapter

WORDS: MÖRAT • PICTURES: ANTHONY SCANGA





here is a moment of buffering. Or perhaps, given that we're waiting to connect, via Zoom, with Corey Taylor, that should be a moment of suffering, just because it sounds more... Slipknot.

The screen unfreezes to reveal the singer in what appears to be a prison cell – horrible off-white curtains and walls, and a crappy wooden desk – but is in fact a hotel room. Wearing black jeans and a sleeveless black T-shirt, twiddling a ball point pen, he lets a smile cross his face.

"I had to come to Poland to see someone from my city!" he says, on tour with Slipknot and aware that I'm talking to him from Las Vegas, the place he's called home for the last 13 years. Not that he's been missing much, apart from a fortnight of biblical rain, thunderstorms and flash floods that turned the Vegas strip into a river.

"Yeah, we need it!" he nods.

Climate change has seen water levels in Lake Mead, the reservoir that feeds the city, fall by a staggering 26 feet in the last year, revealing everything from sunken boats to human remains. Several bodies have been found, one stuffed into a barrel and dating back to the 70s or 80s.

"They found a fucking fifth one!" exclaims Corey. "That's just crazy, man! That's some mob shit! And that's our drinking water!"

Corey is animated today, grinning, goofing around and bringing all the charm you'd expect from metal's self-proclaimed 'Great Big Mouth'. Slipknot have been on the road for almost six months now, taking their Knotfest Roadshow back and forth between the US and Canada before starting this European run. Anyone who's seen the nine-headed beast will attest that they're on form, delighting thousands of Maggots every night.

But when we last spoke to Slipknot, in 2019, ahead of their sixth album, *We Are Not Your Kind*, circumstances weren't so rosy. Corey was recovering from double knee surgery, percussionist Chris Fehn was out of the band, and Clown had tragically lost his daughter, Gabrielle. The tone of their conversation was defiant, but tense. "One day we will just be gone," Jim Root told us.

So when we heard their new, seventh record was titled *The End, So Far*, we couldn't help but worry. Were we about to hear their swansong?

Luckily, Corey is quick to put our minds at ease. The title, he says, refers to "the third era of Slipknot," and the end of one chapter of the band: the first was ferocity, the second was discovery, the third was loss, the fourth was rediscovery, and now the fifth...

"...is kinda turning around and facing the future, like, what's next?" he muses. "Not reintroducing ourselves, but rediscovering why we want to do this. It's Slipknot, so it's a fucking challenge, but it's cool, and I like the fact that the personalities in the band have been willing to branch out now. Some people have mellowed, as much as they've stayed the same, and they've realised that we can really fucking do something. So, I guess the title is a reflection of the end of predisposition, and the end of being too self-conscious to really have the courage to express ourselves. It's basically the end of what was, and the beginning of what could be."

If Corey sounds a little cryptic, it'll all make sense when you hear the record, because *The End, So Far* is their most experimental release in years. While lead-off singles *The*

Chapelton Rag and *The Dying Song (Time To Sing)* saw Slipknot operating on their default setting of savage, the album sees them "branch out" with the addition of bluesy rhythms, choral voices and skewed solos. It's Slipknot, Jim, but not as we know it.

"I've been telling people that this is the natural companion piece to Vol. 3 [*The Subliminal Verses*]," explains Corey. "Because on [2004's] Vol. 3 we were really starting to come into our own, as far as being confident in our writing and being able to risk not just going full bore, running at you with all the intensity, but being able to expand what we do. Because of what was going on with the band internally, we forgot that we were a band who could go and do that. We touched on it, but we never got back to that concerted, 'Let's really push the boundaries of what a band like this can do.' It felt good to kind of get back to this world building."

As if to drive the point home, *Adderall* is a far cry from any previous opening track – certainly a million miles from, *The whole thing, I think it's sick!* on 742617000027 from their 1999 self-titled debut, or even *Insert Coin* on *We Are Not Your Kind*. Perhaps 'ballad' is the wrong word, but it's not far off. With its keys and crooning, there are flashes of Radiohead and 70s prog...

"When you listen to *Adderall*, at first it feels like an intro," explains Corey, "but then you realise this is a proper track, and it takes you where you need to go to listen to this album."

"It was the first tune I got sent," he continues. "Clown told me they'd been working on some stuff on the side, and

I opened it up and it was really a bare-bones demo. It didn't even have drums on it, and the choir wasn't on it. It was almost melancholy, in a weird way, and that's kind of where I took the approach. It wasn't until we got the rest of the band on it that it really

started to build, and it became almost like a test; it was like, 'If you can get through this one with an open mind, then maybe we'll see how you feel about the rest of the album.' It's Clown at his very Clownest!"

If *We Are Not Your Kind* grappled with the maelstrom of uncomfortable emotions arising from Corey's divorce, as well as being a middle finger to keyboard warriors questioning Slipknot's longevity, *The End, So Far* feels less agitated and more self-assured. With their line-up solidified, all identities known, and even 'new' members now on multiple iterations of their mask, the entire band were involved in the writing process.

"It's kinda coming from everybody," Corey tells us. "Clown has really stepped up and he's been making his musical presence felt even more. Obviously, Jim comes in with great shit. And [bassist] V Man has really stepped into his own and brought in some really cool stuff. [Percussionist/backing vocalist Michael] Pfaff is almost dumbing it down from what he can do, because he's classically trained and he can play almost every instrument, so he knows theory and all this shit, and yet he happily pulls on his tortilla skin and runs out there. He's just happy to be here, and he helps with a lot of texture. It's taken us to this really cool realm, and the great thing about Slipknot is it's always a reflection of the people who are in it, which is one of the reasons that the sound has developed over the years and it still feels like an ensemble band."

Corey says he hasn't written much music for Slipknot in a while, because he hasn't needed to, but all the lyrics are his own. Given he's been in good spirits recently, happily married to Alicia Dove of the Cherry Bombs dance troupe, ►

"TORTILLA MAN IS JUST HAPPY TO BE HERE"

COREY TAYLOR

Clown is a demon when
it comes to making his
musical presence felt



mentally at peace, and cheerfully touring his freewheeling solo project, one wonders if he has to step into a darker mindset to write for Slipknot.

"It's easier than you'd think," he reveals. "Obviously, I'm in a great spot. Finally, I have balance, which is unheard of for me! But you can dip your toe into it without immersing yourself. It's like rolling your pants up to get into the pool, without having to swim. You just wanna feel it, but you don't want the full experience. I waded into it up to my knees and then I've had enough and I get out."

"That being said," he continues, "this album, instead of reflecting on my own shit, I'm writing from the standpoint of other people, not just myself, and I'm hoping that it's more relatable. *Heirloom* is a perfect example of writing about people who have grown up being abused and having that toxicity seep in, and then later on in life, when they're in the same position, are they gonna pass on that violence or do they cut the cord? That's something I've never really talked about, and I hope it helps people when they look at the options; they don't have to be the stereotypical victim of abuse. At the end of the day, the choice is yours."

Powerful lyrics can be immensely helpful, lifesaving even, for those who are struggling with mental health issues or tough times. Maybe it's simply the knowledge that you're not alone in those dark places...

"I never write it from that point of view," says Corey, "but I had that with [the reaction to] *Solway Firth*, on the last album. The last line is: 'You want the real smile, I haven't smiled in years', and that was at the end of a very long struggle that I'd been through. With this album, I haven't found it yet, but there's definitely things that people [I've played it to] are gravitating towards."

While Corey says that the last track on the album, the aptly named *Finale*, refers to the band's career thus far, it seems to go deeper. 'I know it's a shame but I gotta stay... because I like it here,' he sings, part apologetically, as his bandmates grind away uneasily, perhaps addressing departed friends he's unwilling to join, suggesting someone turning away from suicide.

"It's a little bit of that," agrees Corey. "I haven't been full-blown suicidal in a very long time, but there was a bit about six years ago when I was very close. It had a lot to do with my life at the time, but it was never a serious option. It was more like when you're leaning up against the wall, just to feel how cool the wall is, y'know? It was almost that respite where you don't know what else to do."

"But *Finale* is not fatalist," he insists. "It's more reflective. It's not all destructive, and it's almost why the album title is so apt, because it's like, 'Where are we gonna go next as a band?' It's letting go of all the things I've been carrying with me for years, or being able to let some of them go. You can't carry those bricks forever; you can either be a survivor or someone who's living. A survivor is someone who wakes up and clings to the fact that they wake up every day; someone who is living wakes up, realises that they survived and enjoys life for what it is. The difference between those two mindsets is very stark, and that's where *Finale* comes in. After everything that's happened, I'm still able to face the future with a sort of glee."

A couple of months ago, Slipknot played Corey's adopted hometown, selling out the 16,000-capacity MGM Grand Garden Arena. It was a spectacular sight, not least when Corey asked how many people were seeing the band for the first time, and a good three-quarters of the audience – some no older than eight – raised

their hands. In a career spanning more than two decades, some of the Maggots have evolved into flies, bringing larvae of their own, and it's clear that Slipknot are not done winning over new fans.

"Yeah, it's damn-near third generation!" Corey grins. "It's something that I say at every show, and I'm surprised every fucking time, because, with the exception of some countries over here in Europe, the percentage is always in favour of people who've never seen us. Twenty-three years we've been doing this, and it's not like we've been hiding. But at the same time, we only tour every four years when we do an album and do a cycle, and then I go back to whatever project I'm working on. We miss certain pockets, but I think a lot of it comes down to the fact that we're just bigger than we've ever been."

Corey compares it to when Metallica put out *The Black Album* and crossed a threshold into mega-stardom. Not, he makes it clear, that he's comparing Slipknot to Metallica, but certainly he's aware that Slipknot, against all odds, are a mainstream band, a household name – and have been for some time. This does, however, raise a question about the current state of metal. Where are the contenders trying to steal their crown?

"There's definitely contenders out there," argues Corey. "There's a lot of hungry bands, but maybe they haven't found their legging yet. There's creative bands like City Morgue and Ho9909 that maybe haven't coalesced around the one album yet. Then you have really heavy bands like Vein.fm and Bleed From Within that maybe haven't

spread their wings yet. There's pockets of bands that are really, really good..."

But no one doing so with their debut album, right out of the gate, blowing away the opposition.

"Well, we took everything and said, 'Fuck it' and just did it," grins Corey. "Maybe that's what's missing now."

The creativity's there, man. Even my boy's band, Vended [also featuring Clown's son, Simon, on drums], they have a fire that I've not seen in a long time. They're visceral, they're in your face, and they fucking love what they do! I'm so proud of him, and I love watching him."

While *The End, So Far* is likely to be another No.1 hit across charts worldwide, and isn't short on blistering moments, there will doubtless be those who insist that some songs would be more suited to Stone Sour... "Go ahead and show me where anybody in this band is in Stone Sour!" Corey shrugs.

To be fair, we could name someone who was in Stone Sour: guitarist Jim Root, who was unceremoniously fired from the band in 2014 and yet continued as a member of Slipknot, which, one imagines, made things rather uncomfortable. Healing took time, says Corey, but the pair are pals again, with a renewed drive for working together.

"He and I are very different people, and we were both going through our own shit in life," explains Corey. "We reconnected, and we're actually talking about doing some stuff on the side, outside of Slipknot or Stone Sour. It's cool to find your friend again and realise that you can find your way back to people that you cared about. Honestly, I can't sit here and say that I wasn't responsible for some of the bad feelings. That can only come with self-reflection, and the fact that the things that were going on in my life rippled and affected other people. Once you own up to that, you can start to mend bridges by showing people that you are truly sorry."

Given the deaths of bassist Paul Gray in 2010 and former drummer Joey Jordison in 2021, there are obviously people with whom those connections are lost, although Corey says that he thinks about them often, not least when writing. ►

"I'M FACING THE FUTURE WITH GLEE"

COREY TAYLOR

Slipknot have crossed
"from band to family"



"They're constantly in my mind," he relates. "Whether it's listening to the music we did or being in cities that we were in together, they're always there. When I write, there's definitely moments when I wonder how they would have played certain parts. But that just means they never truly go away. Their spirit is always there, and the good times are always there. The bad times, too, but you have to go out of your way to go there. The good times are instantaneous."

With that in mind, maybe it's understandable that Corey supports the so-called Pantera reunion, first and foremost because late guitarist Dimebag and drummer Vinnie Paul are being replaced by dear friends Zakk Wylde and Charlie Benante.

"There's no replacing those guys, ever!" he states. "So, if anyone wants to look at this as not full-blown members, fair enough, but it's not like they just replaced them with Tweedledee and Tweedledum. You're talking about family, and the metal community is a massive family. It's not gonna sound like old Pantera, and people need to prepare themselves for that, but with us, Jay does not sound like Joey and V Man doesn't sound like Paul. We continue because we need to and we want to. What we need to be doing, is being supportive of Phil and Rex, because think about how they're gonna feel the first time they step on a stage without the Abbott brothers to play those songs. I know how it feels! It's a fucking shock to the system, and if we're not supportive, then why are you at the fucking concert?"

There were talks in Slipknot about whether to continue or not after Paul died, and again when they parted ways with Joey.

"PAUL AND JOEY ARE CONSTANTLY IN MY MIND"

COREY TAYLOR

"The answer was yes," says Corey, "because we love the music, and I'm hoping it's the same reason for them. Even if this is just a last hoorah, those brothers get a tribute and a send-off, and their legacy is unchained from a murder and goes back to music. As a fan, that's the thing I go back to. If we get a last run with the music, then look at it as a gift."

As Slipknot approach 2023, armed with a clutch of boundary-pushing songs and a growing legion of fans, it seems like this most chaotic of bands are holding steady. The singer says he spends "a good amount of time" with Sid, with Clown, and with Jim once in a while.

"I hang out with people in spurts, and I'd rather do my own thing than hang out with anybody," admits Corey. "I've always been that way. The only person I really, genuinely like hanging out with is my wife. But we're all so comfortable with each other in this band that we roll right into our natural positions. We could have not seen each other for two years, but we roll into the room and it all falls into place. That's when you know that you've crossed from band to family."

He speaks with self awareness. Of knowing that Slipknot is a choice and, after all these years, all the ups and the downs, he's still here for it – and his bandmates had better be too. "We're all almost 50 now, and it's at the point where you're either in it or you're not," he says. "There's no middle of the road! Get your shit together!" **H**

**THE END, SO FAR IS OUT ON SEPTEMBER 30
VIA ROADRUNNER**

Corey Taylor playing Simon Says looks pretty fucking sinister, we've gotta say



HERE WE GO AGAIN, MOTHERFUCKER...

Corey gives us his track-by-track breakdown of *The End, So Far*

ADDERALL

"Adderall is my version of melancholy Sunday, basically, and it's setting the tone for the rest of the album. Lyrically, it's looking inside to be able to pull things out."

THE DYING SONG (TIME TO SING)

"That song is really about the death of empathy and humanity, because of how technology has pulled us out of social circles and social niceties, social anything. It's the musical equivalent of bashing your head against a fucking wall."

THE CHAPELTOWN RAG

"That's about how social media has turned other media into something that is more fantastical than it is any sort of honest reporting. Anyone with a website now considers themselves a reporter — you don't even know where the real news is. I'd say you can wade through all the bullshit and get to the real news, but where's the real news? And when that's the case, there's a real danger. It's the salacious side of people thinking they're reporting, but it's really just their filter, it's just them. When facts are replaced by feelings, how are we ever supposed to learn anything?"

YEN

"Yen' is actually slang for yearning. It's old school, but I liked the application, because the song is about that yearning you have for the person you're actually with, which is a very distinct and different yearning from the yearning for the people that you don't have. To me, that's why this song is worth singing about; it's about my wife, and she brings things out in me that I never knew existed."

HIVEMIND

"A song that gathers everyone together. That feeling that you get at a concert, when you're a part of the group, but you're also yourself, especially for people like me. The only time I feel connected to a group of other people is when I'm at a show. Any other time, I don't like being part of a group; I've never joined a club or whatever. And even when I'm in an audience, I don't really have a connection, but some bands bring it out in me, like when I see Iron Maiden or the Misfits. That brings it out, because you're just so caught up in the motion of it. So, that's what *Hivemind* is about — people coming together for one beautiful moment, but then they scatter like fucking 'roaches once the house lights come on!"



WARRANTY

"This is a tongue-in-cheek look at what people expect from Slipknot. It's basically me turning very specific retail terms into metaphors about what people think they own when it comes to Slipknot, and the fact that after all these years our warranty hasn't run out, but they've had to replace us with a new one. That's my inner metal dad coming out!"

MEDICINE FOR THE DEAD

"*Medicine For The Dead* is one of those songs about anyone who deals with depression, physical depression and clinical depression, who knows the feeling that you get when you start to feel the numbness come on, and you know there's nothing you can do about it, you just have to ride it out. Even if you take meds for it, there's nothing you can do. The fact that the minutes and the hours feel so long, and you're waiting for that wave to go away. For me, it takes at least three days of dealing with that. I don't take meds for it, I just try to deal with it and surround myself with people who will coax me out of it. So, *Medicine For The Dead* is almost from the therapist's standpoint, where you're trying to find the right combination of chemicals for the numb, for the living comatose."

ACIDIC

"*Acidic* is my tip of the hat to one of my biggest influences, which is Acid Bath. This is the 'blues' song that Jay was talking about in certain interviews, but to me it has more of that Southern sludge vibe. The demo really made me feel like I was listening to something off [1994's] *When The Kite String Pops*, which is an amazing, underrated album. It just has this drudge, this slow march towards doom, and I really wanted to play with the metaphors in the lyrics about that, realising that we're all heading towards the same fate."

Do we embrace it or do we fight against it? It's got one of my favourite lines, which is, 'I'm livin' in a dead man's shoes / stolen coat, not much hope for these Cardiac Blues.' It's my homage to the boys in Acid Bath."

HEIRLOOM

"This is from the standpoint of a survivor of domestic abuse, whether it's someone younger or in a relationship. It's about getting through those situations, and wondering if any of that has stuck to them. What are they going to pass on in their life?"

H377

"*H377* is about embracing the fact that everybody hates you! It's the pure pleasure of group misanthropy. I realised a long time ago that not everybody is going to like me, largely because of my opinions and the fact that I don't keep my big mouth shut, and because of the fact that there's not one person on the planet who is loved by everyone. Even Tom Hanks, the beloved Tom Hanks, there was a movement saying that he was eating babies! Tom Hanks? Are you out of your fucking mind? That was the first sign that no one will ever be completely beloved. So, *H377* is really me setting the tone for the fact that I love it: I love the fact that I'm the hero and the villain in my story, and I couldn't give a fuck less! The more people say shit about me, the more I just wanna be myself. As my wife said, anyone who's that mad about your existence is not an enemy, they're a fan! And I'm completely fine about that. Pull up a seat, because it's gonna get better, and you're not gonna like it!"

DE SADE

"That's another song about giving in to the darker sensations that we're all born with, and revelling in them. It's a beautiful melody line, and it fits really well. It's just a great, dark love song that I think people will really dig, and it's got great guitar work by both Mick and Jim."

FINALE

"This is really about the fact that we're turning around and looking at our career so far, our lives and decisions so far. Some of you may not have agreed with it, and some of you may have celebrated with us. But to us, it's just a life, just a career, it's just what we were born to do. And we love it. Whether times are thin or flush, we love it."

OZZY OSBOURNE

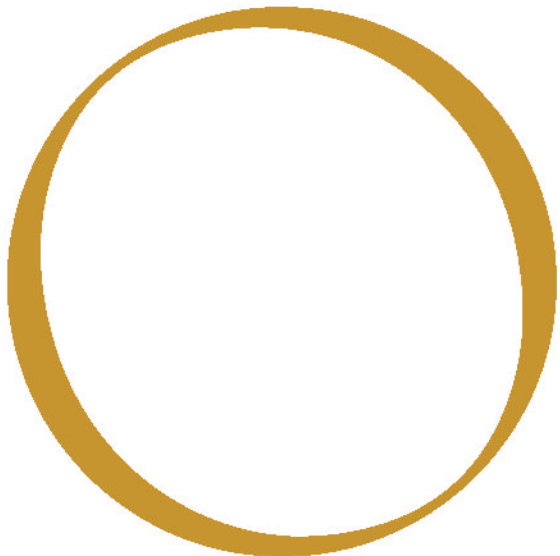




OZZY FOREVER

He's been hospitalised, sliced open, incapacitated and close to death more than once. But as all-star new album *Patient Number 9* proves, a defiant Ozzy Osbourne isn't going out without a fight

WORDS: RICH HOBSON • PORTRAITS: ROSS HALFIN



Osbourne is out of his mind. Not in the 'bite a head off a bat and piss on the Alamo' way, but in a more present sense. He's climbing the walls after being cooped up for close to three years due to a series of serious health issues and operations.

"It's been fucking miserable, man," he says, speaking over Zoom from his home in Los Angeles. "I'm not good at this. I've never been this laid up in my life – I could barely walk at one point."

Ozzy's problem dates back to his quad biking

accident in December 2003, in which he sustained six broken ribs, a broken neck vertebra and a broken collarbone, necessitating the insertion of metal rods in his body. Though he seemed to make a full recovery at the time, even playing with a reunited Black Sabbath the following summer, he was left more vulnerable to injury. A fall in 2019 while he was recovering from a bout of pneumonia dislodged one of the steel rods, requiring him to undergo surgery to insert 15 screws into his spine. That's when things went *really* wrong.

"The first guy who did my surgery cocked it up really fucking bad," says Ozzy angrily. "I ended up in hospital for three months."

The singer underwent further surgery earlier this year to correct the original operation. Ominously, his wife and manager Sharon Osbourne said the results of this last op would "determine the rest of his life".

"The two operations they just did, which were supposed to be more intense than the first, were to repair his damage," says Ozzy, who has also battled a life-threatening staph infection, severe flu and Covid in recent years. "One night I was in hospital – that's it!"

It's been a tough few years for Ozzy, something compounded by the pandemic, but thankfully his problems seem to be behind him for now. The last few times *Hammer* talked to him, he spoke with an air of resigned frustration, sounding every one of his 73 years. But today he sounds reinvigorated. Frustrated, yes, but there's a steely determination to his voice as he reveals the work he's been putting in to get fit again, ahead of his new album *Patient Number 9* and next year's much-postponed world tour.

"It's a slow recovery, but I've been burning the candle at both ends for 50 years," he says. "I do an hour [of physio] a day where I used to do 10. My trainer says, 'Walk up the hill once.' Fucking once?! I'll be running up there by the end of the week. I want to get *back*."

In truth, Ozzy has never really gone away. Granted, when we speak he hasn't played a show in more than three and a half years, but he's not exactly been idle. In 2020 he released *Ordinary Man*, his 12th solo studio album. That had barely hit shelves before it was announced he was working on a follow-up. Hardly the work of a man at death's door.

"I thought I was finished," says Ozzy, referring to the cancellation of the European leg of his No More Tours II tour following his fall in 2019. "We'd had to put the tour off and I was at home thinking that was it. Then Kelly says, 'Dad, do you want to make an album? I know this guy...'"

'This guy' was Andrew Watt, the wunderkind guitarist and producer who has worked with everyone from Justin Bieber to Miley Cyrus. The combination wasn't as unlikely as it sounds. Andrew grew up listening to rock and metal, and he understood Ozzy. The pair gelled immediately, the producer's youthful enthusiasm giving Ozzy the kick in the arse he needed to get back to work.

"It was too fucking quick!" says the singer of making *Ordinary Man*, only half-joking. "It didn't even feel like I'd made an album. Normally, I come out of a studio and I need to spend three months in a mental institution because I'm driving everybody fucking mad. But Andrew's very fucking speedy – he'll jump from one to 10, and leave two to nine out."

Ordinary Man was an unexpectedly poignant album from a man now in his eighth decade, addressing themes of ageing and mortality in ways that Ozzy albums never normally do. By contrast, *Patient Number 9* is a resurrection of the Ozzy Osbourne that filled arenas around the world, heavy metal's original madman at his maniacal best.

"When I'm making music, I ain't thinking about me," Ozzy says. "It gives my head a break. My head is fucking septic, man – it tells me bad shit all the time. If I hadn't done those albums, I'd be fucking insane."

Sanity – or lack of it – is a key theme on *Patient Number 9*'s opening title track. Rather than a reflection of Ozzy's time in and out of hospitals, the song is actually about being trapped in a mental health institution. It features an appearance from guitar legend Jeff Beck. Ozzy gives Andrew Watt full credit for cajoling the former Yardbirds guitarist to appear on the album. "We'd written the track and Andrew says to me, 'Jeff Beck would be good on that,'" Ozzy says. "I said, 'He probably thinks I'm a fucking dickhead!' But Andrew insisted and we got him."

Jeff isn't the only guest to appear on *Patient Number 9*. The all-star cast list includes Eric Clapton, Metallica's Rob Trujillo, Guns N' Roses bassist Duff McKagan and late Foo Fighters drummer Taylor Hawkins. Ozzy asked Jimmy Page to participate as well, only for the Led Zeppelin icon to blank him.

"I don't even know if he plays anymore, but I thought getting Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page meant having the greatest guitarists on the planet," Ozzy says. "But I never heard from him. Maybe he'd lost his phone or something!" ▶

The man, the myth,
the legend... and the
walking medical marvel

**“I’M 73, I CAN’T
DO ALL THIS
ONCE I’M DEAD”**

OZZY OSBOURNE

The new album also sees the return of one of Ozzy's key collaborators: Zakk Wylde, his on-off guitarist and right-hand man for the past 35 years. *Patient Number 9* marks Zakk's first appearance on an Ozzy album since 2007's *Black Rain*.

"I was on the road when Ozzy called," Zakk tells *Hammer*. "Whenever Ozzy calls, I'm there. I don't care if it's playing guitar, dropping off milk and eggs or looking after the dogs while he and Sharon are out – I'll do it."

Working remotely from his home studio The Black Vatican, Zakk contributed to four tracks on *Patient Number 9*, bringing some of the wild energy of Ozzy's earlier releases back into the mix. "Credit where it's due, it's all Ozzy and Andrew when it comes down to it," says the guitarist. "Most of those songs were already written, so they brought me in to colour in basically, add a bit of flavour."

Though Zakk downplays it, Ozzy puts more significance on Zakk's contribution. "I was driving Andrew mad," Ozzy says. "There was a lot of back and forth about getting the album right – I told him it's OK if he produces a bad album because he'll move on to the next guy. If I make a bad album people will say, 'Ozzy Osbourne is finished.' In the end, Zakk saved the day; he put a few things on there that made it feel like a proper Ozzy Osbourne album."

However, the guest to cause the biggest stir is Tony Iommi. His presence reunites the former bandmates five years after they laid Sabbath to rest in their native Birmingham.

"Tony and I have been through a lot together," Ozzy says. "We've had great times, terrible times and everything in between, but even when we've hated each other, we've always stayed in touch. And I don't give a fuck what anyone says, there's no other person on this planet who can come up with riffs like him. He's unbelievable! I always go, 'He ain't gonna beat that!' And he does, every time."

Tony plays on two tracks – *No Escape From Now* and *Degradation Rules* – bringing a heft and darkness that will be comfortably familiar to Black Sabbath fans. "Those Tony Iommi tracks, especially *No Escape From Now*, if Geezer and Bill had played on them would have made a fucking great Sabbath tracks," Ozzy says.

Today, the singer speaks fondly of his former bandmates, describing Tony as "incredibly supportive" while admitting that he hasn't spoken to bassist Geezer Butler in a while ("Last I heard, he was living in Vegas"). Even drummer Bill Ward, absent from the Sabbath reunion in 2012 following a dispute over contracts, is in regular contact.

"It's my only regret [with Sabbath] that Bill couldn't work the deal out," Ozzy says. "But I love him – I love all of them, in one way or another. We were four kids from Aston who conquered the world. I've got a bench in Birmingham – some people get statues, I got a park bench!"

There's a gag that only two things would survive a nuclear holocaust: cockroaches and seemingly indestructible Rolling Stones guitarist Keith Richards. It's not a stretch to add Ozzy to that list.

Even beyond his once-epic appetite for booze and drugs in the 70s and 80s, there have been several health issues that could have forced him into early retirement over the past 30 years. In 1992, he was diagnosed with MS. "I had two spinal taps, MRIs up the yin-yang; I was like a fucking laboratory experiment," he recounts. The diagnosis turned out to be incorrect, though it didn't stop him from announcing his retirement after that year's original No More Tours dates. The retirement didn't last; he later said that he got bored very, very quickly just hanging around at home.

In 2003, Ozzy was diagnosed with Parkinson's, though he didn't reveal the diagnosis until 2020. "It's no big deal, I take a pill and it's fine," he says dismissively now. "I'm lucky. The doctor who deals with my Parkinson's said, 'You know what? I've seen all kinds of Parkinson's, but yours is the mildest case I've ever seen in my life.' I'm a fucking fighter – I'll fight through. I'm still fucked up, but I'm getting better."

Factor in the quad bike accident that very nearly killed him and his subsequent physical traumas, and it's easy to see why concerns for his wellbeing have grown over the last few years. But while others wonder that he might be at death's door, Zakk Wylde insists he never worried. Although the guitarist wasn't able to see Ozzy during the pandemic, the pair shared texts every day to stop the other from bouncing off the walls.

"I knew whenever he'd got something going on, so we'd text and I'd ask for texts as soon as he got out of surgery," Zakk says. "Back when he had his first surgery, we went to the hospital and actually saw him for a bit. It blew the whole thing back into proportion, because he's there and he's fine. Even when he got Covid, it was just like, 'Oh man, what have you gotten yourself into now?' He'd make some goofy-ass comment afterwards, just being himself."

Even after everything he's been through, Ozzy remains adamant he isn't planning on retiring just yet. "You know the most valuable thing I've got now? Time," he says. "I'm 73, so I can't do all this once I'm dead. I'm doing as much as I can to leave behind before I go."

"With Ozzy, I always think of when they asked Keith Richards years ago, 'Do you plan on retiring?'" Zakk muses. "He goes, 'Retire? From what?' If you like going to the coffee shop and reading a good book, why would you retire from that? As a musician, if there's nothing stopping you from physically going out and doing what you love, why should you give that up?"

True enough, Ozzy's main focus right now is on getting back out on the road. His No

More Tours II run, twice postponed, is now set to take place in summer 2023. After multiple cancellations, Ozzy is absolutely determined not to put the dates off again.

"It's fucking killing me, man," he says. "Sitting on my arse makes the 'poor-me's come on, but that's not what I'm about. I'm about doing gigs – it's in my bones and if I have another year like this, I'll go out in a fucking wheelchair."

Ozzy's return to the stage comes sooner than anyone expected. Three weeks after we speak, he makes a surprise appearance at the closing ceremony of the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham. He's joined by Tony Iommi, plus auxiliary Black Sabbath members Adam Wakeman and Tommy Clufetos for a truncated blast through Sabbath's *Iron Man* and a full, glorious *Paranoid*.

It's spectacular tribute to one of Birmingham's favourite sons, and Ozzy is relishing it. As several tons of pyrotechnics illuminate the stadium, a massive smile spreads across the singer's face. He's home: not just in the city of his birth, but up onstage, where he belongs. "I love you all, Birmingham!" he yells. "It's good to be back!"

His reaction wasn't a surprise. Talking to *Hammer* a few weeks earlier, he'd once again reiterated his desire to get back out there. "My wife and family mean the world to me," he said thoughtfully. "I've been home for the longest time I've ever been home and they've been fucking great. But do I want to stay here doing this? You've got to be fucking joking. I will be up there if I have to fucking crawl up there."

"I WAS LIKE A FUCKING LABORATORY EXPERIMENT"

OSZY OSBOURNE

PATIENT NUMBER 9 IS OUT NOW VIA SONY MUSIC

In his element: Ozzy's surprise appearance at Birmingham's Commonwealth Games

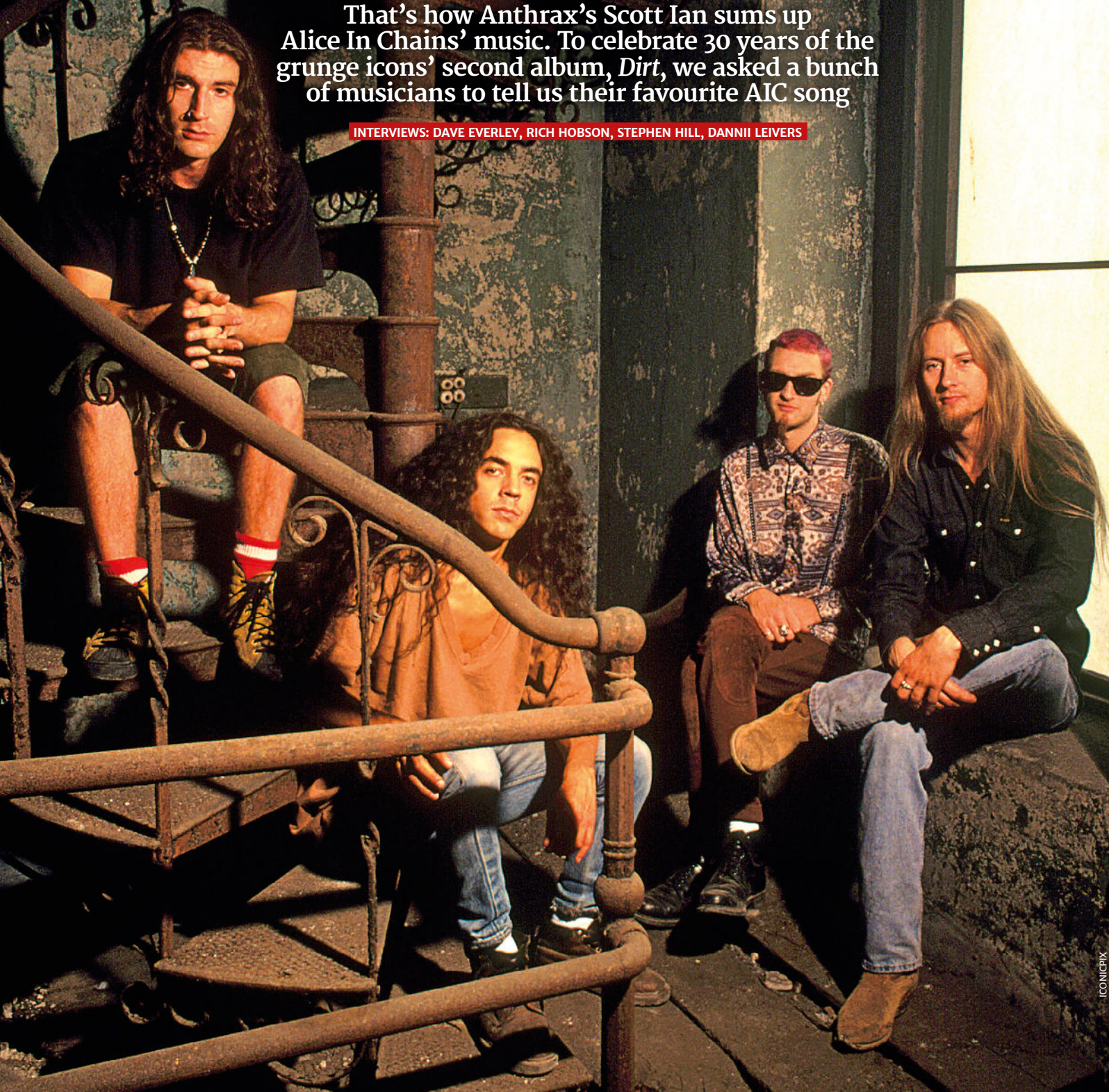


ALICE IN CHAINS

“DARKNESS. BRUTALITY. BEAUTY”

That's how Anthrax's Scott Ian sums up Alice In Chains' music. To celebrate 30 years of the grunge icons' second album, *Dirt*, we asked a bunch of musicians to tell us their favourite AIC song

INTERVIEWS: DAVE EVERLEY, RICH HOBSON, STEPHEN HILL, DANNII LEIVERS



When Alice In Chains singer Layne Staley died on April 5, 2002, it seemingly marked the end of the road for one of the greatest and most influential bands of the previous decade. Alice In Chains rose from the ashes of a bunch of local big-haired hard rock outfits to become grunge's first true breakout band. Their 1990 debut album, *Facelift*, sold half a million copies in the US, cracking open the door for the likes of Soundgarden and Nirvana to step through into the mainstream, while 1992's monumental if harrowing *Dirt* remains not just AIC's finest hour, but one of the decade's landmark albums.

But the demons that haunted the band, and Layne in particular, were their undoing. They managed just a handful of further releases – the acclaimed, largely acoustic *Sap* and *Jar Of Flies* EPs, 1995's claustrophobic self-titled third album, and the following year's darkly powerful *MTV Unplugged* live album – before the singer retreated into his addictions. By the time of his death from an overdose of heroin and cocaine, he hadn't been seen publicly in five years.

But the story didn't end with Layne's death. Unexpectedly, guitarist Jerry Cantrell, drummer Sean Kinney and bassist Mike Inez reunited in 2006 with new singer William DuVall, subsequently releasing three albums that underlined their legacy without attempting to replicate the past.

Today, the band's influence can be heard across the rock and metal spectrum. To mark the 30th anniversary of *Dirt*, we asked some of music's biggest names to choose the Alice In Chains song that influenced them the most. This is what they had to say.

THEM BONES

Chosen by Kerry King

Existential bleakness meets black humour on Dirt's classic opening song



Kerry: "Them Bones is such a great song – super-short, heavy, great video and these really haunting vocal melodies. Those dudes were untouchable on their first two records, they were really vibing as a band and Layne was just a superstar. They played on the [US 1990 package tour] Clash Of The Titans, and on the first couple of dates we'd be backstage going, 'Who is that with that fucking voice?' And we started going out to watch the entire set every night. It was just one of those moments."

RAIN WHEN I DIE

Chosen by Halestorm's Lizzy Hale

Enigmatic dissection of a turbulent relationship wrapped up in knowing fatalism



Lizzy: "Layne Staley was a legend; his voice was otherworldly. My bandmates and I have gotten to listen to some Atmos mixes, it's almost like if you're listening to a song in 3D. I got to listen to *Rain When I Die* and hear Layne's vocals solo. You can hear the tinkling of his jewellery, and in between every line he's like [takes a deep breath]. It's just such *power* – it gave me goosebumps then and it gives me goosebumps thinking about it now. That's a song that I would love to cover one day."

DOWN IN A HOLE

Chosen by Zakk Wylde

The love letter to Jerry Cantrell's girlfriend that became grunge's greatest power ballad



Zakk: "I remember being on the road with Alice In Chains, and Jerry Cantrell and Layne Staley came into my dressing room to jam on my electric guitar. So I was getting them to blast those songs out, playing the whole *Dirt* album, basically! They get to *Down In A Hole* and I'm just floored – it's so epic, and obviously when you hear the production on that track, you really feel it. The melody is amazing."

WOULD?

Chosen by Max Cavalera

Brooding tribute to late Mother Love Bone singer Andrew Wood and a marker of impending greatness



Max: "I first heard it on a movie soundtrack [1992 grunge rom-com *Singles*] and I really dug that melody, it was beautifully sung by Layne. We did some gigs with Alice In Chains and Ozzy Osbourne back in the day, and Layne would come hang out on the bus with us – he was real cool. In fact, Ozzy used *Would?* almost every day for soundcheck – I don't know if the sound guy was obsessed with them or whatever, but he would play it five or six times in a row some days. That stuck with me, but luckily I love that song, so I didn't care."

CHECK MY BRAIN

Chosen by Skindred's Benji Webb

New boy William DuVall makes his mark with this instant-classic Black Gives Way To Blue single



Benji: "I play *Check My Brain* at every DJ set I do. I love it, it's such a big song. I first heard it in a car going along the PCH [Pacific Coast Highway] on my way into California. It came on rock radio and I was just like, 'What is this? It's badass!' The view going along that road from Malibu to Venice is so epic, and that song always takes me back to that moment."

DAM THAT RIVER

Chosen by Incubus's Brandon Boyd

Dirt's grinding second track, which may or may not have been inspired by the Green River Killer



Brandon: "With a band like Alice In Chains, it's almost impossible just picking one song, especially because so often I'll sit there listening to their whole albums. But I'll go for *Dam That River*. I absolutely love how *Dirt* smashes from *Them Bones* right into *Dam That River*. I saw them at Lollapalooza. I performed *Man In The Box* with Jerry Cantrell at a private show, where I sang the vocal and his dick popped out his leather pants right at the first chorus. It was one of the greatest moments of my life. It was an event!" ▶

ROTTEN APPLE

Chosen by Napalm Death's Shane Embury

Mellow highlight from 1994's *Jar Of Flies* showcases another side to Alice In Chains



Shane: "I loved Alice In Chains from *Facelift* – *Man In The Box* was always on at [Birmingham rock club] Edwards. And *Dirt* was immense, every track on that was just a winner. But the *Jar Of Flies* EP was so different from *Dirt*. It was mellow; it had its own vibe. It was sad music, and I think I was probably sad myself at times when I listened to it. I saw them with Screaming Trees and Gruntruck at the Palladium in LA. I saw them backstage at a distance, and they had a massive buzz about them. Did I say hello? Nah, I was too shy. I wish I had done."

LOVE, HATE, LOVE

Chosen by A.A. Williams

Conflicting emotions prompt soul-deep anguish on hypnotic *Facelift* deep cut



A.A. Williams: "When I listen through *Facelift* I adore the way that *Love, Hate, Love* presents a real shift in pace to slower, groovier territory. A fairly sparse arrangement, simple textural changes make big differences – the slower tempo and less regimented percussion give a different sense of weight to that found on the rest of the album. The jangly guitars and minimal rhythm section create a hypnotic bed for Layne's impassioned and effortless vocal delivery, creating a song that could almost be an ominous, sultry, grungy Bond theme."

NUTSHELL

Chosen by Cane Hill's Elijah Witt

The *Jar Of Flies* EP track that still stands as one of AIC's bleakest songs



Elijah: "I think *Jar Of Flies* is Alice In Chains' best release, because it shows their versatility as a band – it keeps that pain and heaviness in an acoustic form. *Nutshell* makes you understand what it's like to feel alone inside the prison you've built around yourself with your own vices. The first time I heard Alice In Chains was the first time I heard an artist's true pain. There was audible anguish in everything Layne sang. If you want to hear the pain of a man dying, Alice In Chains is the mood."

A LOOKING IN VIEW

Chosen by Tetrarch's Diamond Rowe

William DuVall's first single with Alice In Chains and the song that launched their second act



Diamond: "Alice In Chains are a band that genuinely only come around once in a lifetime. There's something so uniquely different about them. *A Looking In View* feels like a drug trip or a high that you can't come down from. I love songs that sound ominous and unsettling and this is just that. The entire song feels like something bad is about to happen and their ability to consistently produce songs with that vibe intrigues me. There's a soul to the vocal harmonies and melodies that is just so creepy, and the dynamics of the song work perfectly. Jerry's guitar work in that song and how it drones is amazing as well. He's one of the best guitar players, and at catching a vibe of a song and running with it."

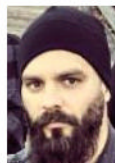
The late, lamented Layne Staley performing on MTV Unplugged in 1996



HEAVEN BESIDE YOU

Chosen by Killswitch Engage's Jesse Leach

A respite from the opiated intensity of Alice In Chains' self-titled third album



Jesse: "I was in my final year of school when I first heard *Heaven Beside You*. I loved Alice In Chains and I remember thinking, 'Oh, this is different, slower and less heavy.' It's dark poetry set to music – the vibe is bluesy, but with that AIC feel that only they can pull off. I also love that Jerry takes lead vocals on this one, which really reveals his importance to the sound and soul of the band. A lot of people lean hard on Layne's legacy, and I get that, but without Jerry there is no Alice In Chains. To this day, they're still putting out great music, and I'll be a fan for as long as they continue doing what they do."

"IT'S DARK POETRY SET TO MUSIC. ONLY THEY CAN PULL IT OFF"

JESSE LEACH

SUNSHINE

Chosen by Alter Bridge's Mark Tremonti

Jerry Cantrell's cathartic tribute to his late mother, Gloria, from their debut album

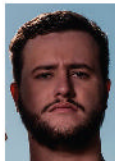


Mark: "Alice In Chains will always be one of my favourite bands. When the *Facelift* record came out, it blew me away. I listened to it endlessly for about six months straight. I always loved the chorus on *Sunshine*. It just did the thing that great songs do – it made me feel and gave me the chills. It made me want to pick up the guitar and write a song of my own. I've said this before, but I think Jerry Cantrell is one of the greatest modern rock songwriters. Pair that with Layne Staley and the magic is undeniable."

ROOSTER

Chosen by Alien Weaponry's Henry de Jong

Troubled father-son relationship meets paternal admiration in this salute to Jerry's Vietnam-vet dad



Henry: "Alice In Chains were a household favourite when I was growing up – my dad loves them, so me and [brother/AW frontman] Lewis grew up listening to them. I worked as a mechanic for about seven months after I left school, and a radio station we have called

The Rock would play this every day without fail. Me and my co-worker would just belt it out. What's brilliant about it is that they've managed to make something so beautiful out of something so sad and harrowing. It's an amazing artistic expression."

GRIND

Chosen by Gojira's Christian Andreu

AIC's ultimate clapback to the haters: 'You'd be well advised not to plan my funeral before the body dies'



Christian: "Me and my best friend spent our evenings listening to music, and he called me one night to listen to the new 'Dog Album' [Alice In Chains' self-titled third album, with a three-legged dog on the cover]. It struck me as true masterpiece. *Grind* is the first song, and it's so mesmerising. When I listen to it, I feel like I'm suspended in air from the beginning to the end. There's only one main beat, but so many amazing melodies and great guitar solos. For AIC, anything and everything was possible. I always liked that feeling of freedom when listening to their music."

DON'T FOLLOW

Chosen by Shinedown's Brent Smith

A harmonica is busted out for an uncharacteristically breezy back-porch acoustic ballad



Brent: "The *Jar of Flies* EP is brilliant. For a band that was fuelled by dark imagery and tone, there was a light-hearted approach to this album, and a sincerity of overwhelming emotion. The song *Don't Follow* will always be special to me, as it reminds me of my early teenage years. It's acoustic, beautiful and reminds me of simpler times. I love this song, and all the nostalgia that comes along with it."

Alice In Chains 2.0 have paid tribute to Layne Staley in song

BLACK GIVES WAY TO BLUE

Chosen by Ocean Of Slumbers' Cammie Beverly

AIC's comeback album closed with Jerry Cantrell's piano elegy to Layne Staley



Cammie: "I wasn't really allowed to have a whole lot of CDs growing up, so a lot of what I listened to came from hearing it on the local alternative rock radio station. That's how I heard Alice In Chains – they had this raw, passionate, unbridled way of making music. *Black Gives Way To Blue* is just a wonderful, impactful, moving song. The vocals are so poignant, you can really hear everything they've been through. That's one of the great things about Alice In Chains – they've had so many tribulations, but their music has stood the test of time."

"THE MUSIC HAS STOOD THE TEST OF TIME"

CAMMIE GILBERT



Left to right: Mike Inez, William DuVall, Sean Kinney, Jerry Cantrell

STONE

Chosen by Loathe's Erik Bickerstaffe

Jerry Cantrell wrote the riff while recovering from surgery



Erik: "I hadn't intently listened to a song by Alice In Chains before, aside from playing *Them Bones* on *Guitar Hero* when I was younger, but *Stone* [from *The Devil Put Dinosaurs Here*]

completely caught me off guard. The way they approach melody is so abstract, in the best way. Such a good bass tone instantly; amazing mix and amazing riff, too, because of the phrasing and the bends. They don't stray away from including 'uncomfortable' or less traditional movements in their choruses or in their riffs – they're so mean and so heavy too."

DIRT

Chosen by Tesseract's James Monteith

Layne wallows in the grime on the second album's monumental title track



James: "AIC's haunting close harmonies are one of their most defining characteristics. The intro to the song *Dirt* is a wonderful example of how powerful it sounds, and still

gives me shivers down my spine to this day. I remember first hearing it at a house party when I was 15. I was a few cans of terrible cider in, my mind was blown and I was instantly hooked. The combination of delicate beauty with dark overtones was a gamechanger for me. A massive eye-opener as to how you can mix emotions to a great effect."

WHAT THE HELL HAVE I

Chosen by Irist's Rodrigo Carvalho

Swirling deep cut that found an unlikely home in 1993 Arnie blockbuster *Last Action Hero*



Rodrigo: "As soon as you listen to the sitar sound of the initial riff, you know that something special is going to come. *What The Hell Have I* is so mesmerising that it makes you feel like you're in a maze, only this time you don't want to escape. Being lost in the song's melody and layers of vocals and strings simply feels amazing to me. I never just listen to it once."

ALL I AM

Chosen by Malevolence's Konan Hall

Moody balladry from 2018's *Rainier Fog* album, and proof that Alice In Chains have still got it



Konan: "This is one of their newer songs, but to me it still embodies the miserable grunge from all those years ago. To me, this eerie, low-tempo ballad is atmospherically and lyrically a point of self-reflection of the band's career and the audience's lives and own experiences; the scars and hardships you face along the way; the triumphs and low points where you find yourself asking, 'Is this all I am?'"

ANGRY CHAIR

Chosen by Ithaca's Sam Chetan-Welsh

Childhood torment meets adult addiction on Layne's bleakly autobiographical song



Sam: "Alice In Chains were a real gateway band for me when I was younger, certainly on the sludgier side of things, and I used to listen to *Angry Chair* a lot. I actually found the whole *Dirt* album scary, and this was the scariest of all.

Even now when I listen back on it, the way Layne Staley double-tracks his vocals in the verse melody, kind of like a Gregorian chant, makes me feel a little sick – in a good way. They were a supremely innovative band, and people don't really give them credit for the range of influences they were bringing in, from funk to sludge metal. And they used harmonies better than anyone else – even in *Angry Chair*, the harmonies in the chorus are pleasant but then they get darker and weirder."

JUNKHEAD

Chosen by Pallbearer's Brett Campbell

Dirt hits its (metaphorical) low point: 'What's my drug of choice/Well, what have you got?'



Brett: "Jerry Cantrell is a master of writing simple, memorable riffs that twist in some way as to make them unique. A perfect example of that, the big draw of *Junkhead*, is that lurching, staggering riff that sounds as fucked-up as the narrator of the song. The lyrics describe a junkie who has embraced, and enjoys, the lifestyle, but the musical atmosphere is degraded and sour. It's a juxtaposition that works perfectly. The blissful guitar harmonies in the bridge suggest the drug-induced euphoria experienced by the narrator, but before long, that insistent riff smashes the listener back to the bleak reality."

MAN IN THE BOX

Chosen by Anthrax's Scott Ian

The song that landed Alice In Chains on MTV and opened the door for grunge



Scott: "We were putting together the Clash Of The Titans tour with Anthrax and Slayer and Megadeth, and we had a meeting to talk about support bands. Dave Mustaine said, 'Hey, check this out!' and handed me a CD of Alice In Chains' first record. I hadn't even heard of them;

I thought it was some hair band. Then I put it on in the car on the way home and I was blown away. I could not believe how fucking good it was. It was not thrash and it was not 80s hard rock. They had the riffs, the hooks, the vocals, but there was this pop thing to it – I mean, *Man In The Box* is a straight-up pop song in terms of arrangement, but it's so fucking heavy. Like, Black Sabbath heavy.

"That was thing about them. They had this darkness and brutality, but there was a beauty to it. There were so many dichotomies to what they did, and to them as people as well. I remember the first show they played on the Clash Of The Titans tour, and I expected them to just be up there

shoegazing, but they were jumping around, headbanging – Layne was in the crowd's faces. He'd jump in the crowd and fight people.

"There's this myth of darkness around them, but those guys were just fucking goofballs. We stayed in the same hotels every day and there were many, many nights spent drinking with them. We'd go fishing with them. But when it came to facing down thousands of Slayer and Megadeth and Anthrax fans, they would not back down. I had such respect for that then, and I still do today." **H**

"THOSE GUYS WERE JUST FUCKING GOOFBALLS"

SCOTT IAN



These guys had no time for shoegazing: they wanted to fight. Or occasionally, fish

GETTY

GLORIA CAVALERA



THE HAMMER INTERVIEW

GLORIA CAVALERA

She's the self-taught manager who steered her husband Max's band, Sepultura, to global success. Even heartbreaking tragedy and painful acrimony haven't dented her groundbreaking career

WORDS: ELEANOR GOODMAN





A couple of months ago, Gloria Cavallera was watching a movie when her phone rang. It was 10.30pm, and her husband Max told her not to answer it. She picked up anyway. The voice on the other end was unfamiliar, but they said that their mother had passed away.

Abandoning the movie, Gloria took the time to chat with this stranger. "I really tried to be the person who's there, even though I've had a lot of mud slung at me through the years," she says today. "The more mud that was slung, the more I learned about people. I think it helped me to grow a lot, you know?"

Born Gloria Bujnowski to a mother who survived a Nazi concentration camp in Austria, she was a fiercely independent spirit early on, hanging out with hippies while still in her teens. By the mid-80s, she'd embarked on a career in management, eventually going on to help turn unknown Brazilian metal band Sepultura into a global phenomenon. Along the way, she and frontman Max Cavallera fell in love and got married. Sadly, tragedy struck when her son Dana Wells died in a car crash in 1996, plunging the family into grief. An acrimonious dispute between Sepultura and Gloria just a few months later resulted in her quitting as manager of the band she had done so much to build, with Max exiting at the same time.

Today, Gloria is still a powerhouse, looking after Max's post-Sepultura band Soulfly alongside his many other projects, while acting as a 'metal mom' to her immediate and chosen family.

You were raised in South Dakota, but you left home at 16. Why?

"I'd gotten pregnant when I was 16, and I married a man who had just returned from Vietnam. It wasn't really the best decision, but every one of those bad decisions gave me the opportunity to take a step up or a step back. And, you know, I grew up with my mother talking about being in a concentration camp [in WWII]. She was very vocal about politics and freedom, and how important freedom was."

When did you become aware that your mum had been in a concentration camp?

"She'd sit there and say, 'Oh, you know, I saw my friends tied to a tree with nails in their head.' She talked about it all the time. I found a 52-page story that I wrote, I must have been 11 years old, called *The Yellow Star*, and it was about being in a concentration camp. I think that always was embedded in me. We actually took my mom back to the concentration camp that she was in [Mauthausen in Austria], and they said that she was the first woman survivor that they recalled had come back to see it."

In the early 80s, you ran a bar called Bootleggers in Phoenix, Arizona, with your brother. How did that come about?

"I was managing a famous pizza restaurant called Beau Jo's in Colorado. My brother was an oil surveyor, and he was like, 'I'm tired of working for someone else, and you're working for someone else – let's go buy a club.' We pushed the pool tables together and made a drum riser. We went out at night and swiped milk crates from all the businesses around us. And we got some sheets of plywood, and then we made the stage. [Jason Newsted's original band] Flotsam And Jetsam became our house band."

After the bar was closed down by the city in 1986, you began managing Sacred Reich. How did you figure out what to do?

"I was pregnant with my fifth child, Jason, and I fell into a bit of a depression because we basically lost every single thing that we had. [Sacred Reich guitarist] Jason Rainey called me one day and he goes, 'Will you manage us?' and I was like, 'Sure, I'll manage you.' Then I hung up, and I was like, 'What does a manager even do?' It took me a year and a half to get a tour; I couldn't get a tour to save my soul, it was so hard! Ha ha! When I finally got a booking

agent, he gave us a tour for two weeks – then he got thrown in prison for tax evasion during the tour! I went on all the tours. I'd sell the merch, and manage from behind the merch table."

How did you manage with five kids back in '86? That's quite a responsibility.

"It was really hard. I would work all day long on the phone. At five o'clock every day, I would work at a company selling Time Life books, and that was where I learnt, 'Don't take no for an answer', because I needed to make the income to do my other job, and also take care of the family."

Who were your early mentors?

"When I was first starting, [Roadrunner Records founder] Cees Wessels was always very open, he'd listen, even when I went off on my tangents! Ha ha! [Possessed manager] Debbie Abono showed me friendship and trust, loyalty and love. She also had five children, and she was a single mom, and so we shared a lot in common. She had a son who was murdered also. When Dana died, that's when I really began to look up to Sharon Osbourne. She was this enigma, was a queen on a mountain. And then when I started to know her, I realised her heart was bigger than anyone I had ever met. She was so positive and so happy, and she had also been through so many things."

How did you get involved with Sepultura?

"[Roadrunner A&R executive] Monte Conner asked me if I would manage them, and I was like, 'I don't really know them.' I got a gig for Sacred Reich with King Diamond at The Ritz in New York [in 1989]. Sepultura were on there, and Cees had invited several

managers. When I got there, all the managers came up to me and said, 'Don't take them' – they were foreigners. My mum was a foreigner, so I didn't really pay much attention to any of that. Their set was brilliant, and the first thing that was in my head was, 'Somebody's gonna take advantage of these guys.' So I went and sat down next to Cees, and I was like, 'OK, I'll take 'em', and he started laughing."

What were your first impressions of them?

"They were playing in The Mason Jar [in Phoenix], and so I met them there. They were all crammed into a van, they didn't have water onstage, Paulo [Jr, bassist] had this pick that looked like a mouse had been chewing on it for a month. They were signed to some manager, some person who managed someone like [R'n'B legend] Eartha Kitt. I was like, 'I don't know what you guys are doing with that manager.' I don't steal artists, and so they negotiated some kind of deal with Roadrunner and they paid that manager to free them. Then I got this little postcard from Max: 'I really hope you'll work with us, Kisses, Max.' I said, 'OK, I'll work with you guys for one year, but I'm not gonna take any pay.' I wanted to know if we were even gonna get along. Then, right away, they had me buying their shoes, their lunches... ha ha!"

What made you think you could break this underground Brazilian band?

"I never really looked at it as if I could break anybody. I looked at it as if I could do better than what they'd been doing. When I did my first meeting with them, I said, 'The first thing I'm gonna tell you right now is never, ever say you're death metal again, just be metal', and they were like, 'Huh?', and I was like, 'Trends die, and I want you to be something solid, not just something that's here for a minute or two.' At first, when I was with Sepultura, it was more like a party type of atmosphere, everybody was drinking, doing shots onstage. Then as I could feel things growing, I made a step to change myself to be more of a professional manager, and really put time into the bills."

"I WAS BUYING SEPULTURA'S SHOES AND THEIR LUNCHES!"

Gloria Cavalera: do not give
this woman any shit!



Did you and Max have an instant connection, or did it take a while for your relationship to get off the ground?

"We just realised that we were starting to have feelings for each other, and I was like, 'Oh...' I didn't know how to tell the kids, I didn't know how to tell people, I didn't know how to tell myself that we were falling in love with each other, it was just so gradual. You know, even when we got married, I didn't want to get married. I'd had failed marriages and I didn't really believe in marriage; we had already had Zy [Zyon Cavallera, born in 1993], and things were going along really good. We bought a house, then because of Max's Brazilian nationality, he had to leave and come back and forth. He was like, 'I don't want to do this anymore.' Once Max and I started our relationship, he didn't want me to manage other bands or be on tour with someone else, so I just gave it my all."

You lost your son Dana in August 1996. That's an awful thing for a mother to go through. How did you get through it?

"I really got through it because Dana's girlfriend moved into our house, and we went out trying to solve his murder. Max was in the bedroom, writing, then at the end of the day, we would put our day together. We leaned on each other so tightly. I remember when we went to do *Head Up* [Deftones' tribute song for Dana] – when I see pictures of me now, I'm like a skeleton. I remember I couldn't eat, I was like, 'Well, Dana can't eat, how can I eat?' It was Max who pulled me to him even more. I didn't think I'd be able to survive that. Grief is like a lion; you never know when it's gonna pounce. *Spirit Animal* is the new Soulfly song. It starts out with our granddaughter, she was a few months old, she was growling, and that's written for a group of bereaved parents that I'm with on Twitter."

Sepultura said they fired you as a manager after their show at Brixton Academy in London in December 1996, but you told us that your contract had run out. Some fans blamed you for the split, but you encouraged Max to stay, didn't you?

"Yeah, I told him to stay with them. I'm like, 'You know what, I can manage a million bands, and this is your baby, you need to stay.' But really, Dana's death was such a big turning point for Max and me both; it ripped our eyelids off. It made our eyes see what was going on, and the things we were telling ourselves weren't going on because we didn't want them to be going on. I had just buried my son, and I was told that two weeks was long enough, get on the road, act like a professional. When I made the tour to end on the last day of my contract and I walked out of that room, there was so much chaos in the bus, and chaos everywhere, fighting and drunken behaviour from people. To me, it was like I left my chains in Brixton, and I walked on."

"I LEFT MY CHAINS IN BRIXTON AND WALKED ON"

What happened next?

"I didn't know where I was going to go or where I was going to end up, but once you bury a child, a band is a band, and you get your feelings in perspective in a different way about life in general. Max came home and started writing right away. He wrote [Soulfly songs] *Eye For An Eye* and *Tribe*. Then we both found different ways to take care of that horrible feeling, that betrayal. It was so incredible to have all these things happen all at once."

What's your relationship like with Max today compared with when you met each other?

"We're used to each other now, we're a parallel entity, and I think we'll stay like that. His goal is to get a motorhome, take off for a year, and drive around America seeing different things."



Max and Gloria: a very metal power couple

We've spent so much time working and touring, so I think we're looking for a bit more time to spend with each other, even though we've spent every minute together. We're looking for some personal time."

How long do you see yourself being a manager? Do you think you'd ever hand the reins of Max's career to someone else?

"I'm probably gonna turn into dust on a stage somewhere, to be honest with you. That guy is not gonna give me a break! I don't see myself stopping for a while just because it's so much a part of our life. It's just a big tapestry that goes together."

What do you think your legacy is?

"I really don't know. I think it's got a dark side, to be honest with you, which makes me a little sad sometimes. One time, a publicist I worked with said, 'It's a shame you'll probably be mostly remembered for something that you didn't even do', and so I don't really know that I would have a legacy that I would appreciate having."

It's a shame you can't see the brighter sides of it, because you have done so much in your career, and you have your family as well...

"Somebody said to me, 'How do you feel about being called Yoko Ono?' and I said, 'Are you fucking kidding me? I'm compared to a Beatles wife?' That's the most spectacular thing in the world; John Lennon was the coolest Beatle by far, and I've got a pretty cool guy, too, ha ha ha! I don't think it was the answer they [expected] from me. I wish my legacy would have been a bit more polished, but things happen in your life, and with social media, a lot of things get out there. I hope that I'll be known for being a woman who was able to bring a lot of art and helped a lot of people when they had bad times. Music saves, and I'd like to be known for being a compassionate, humble person." 

SOULFLY'S LATEST ALBUM, *TOTEM*, IS OUT NOW VIA NUCLEAR BLAST

The background of the advertisement features a stack of Marshall guitar amplifiers. The top amplifier has a black grille with the white 'Marshall' script logo and a gold control panel with knobs for 'MIDDLE', 'TREBLE', 'MASTER', and 'PRE-AMP'. Below it is another amplifier with a similar design. The bottom-most visible amplifier is a 'JCM 900' model, labeled '100W Hi Gain Dual Reverb', with a gold control panel featuring multiple knobs for 'VOLUME', 'REVERB', 'PRESENCE', and 'MIDDLE'. A black Marshall hoodie is draped over the right side of the amplifiers, with the gold 'Marshall' script logo embroidered on the chest. The overall aesthetic is dark and iconic, representing the Marshall brand's heritage in rock music.

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A large crowd of people at a concert, seen from behind, looking towards a stage. The air is filled with falling confetti. The scene is lit with purple and blue stage lights. At the bottom of the image, there is a white and black striped pattern.

ELECTRIC CALLBOY

Before lockdown, Electric Callboy were plugging away in youth centres. Now they're headlining arenas. We flew to their native Germany to ask...

HOW THE HELL DID THIS HAPPEN?

WORDS: DANNI LEIVERS • PICTURES: WILL IRELAND

ELECTRIC CALLBOY



Under neon pink and green lights, 8,000 fans are going berserk inside Oberhausen's cavernous Rudolf Weber-Arena. As streamers blast into the rafters and fountains of pyro burst upwards, a hardstyle beat spurs the kind of mass rave you'd

expect from fellow German club veterans Scooter. Moments later, Electric Callboy, the band orchestrating the carnage, dressed in furry white gilets and bowl cut wigs, tear into a breakdown meatier than Till Lindemann's left thigh, and the mayhem kicks up a notch, with seething pits sucking up bodies like a black hole.

Chaos like this has been commonplace in Electric Callboy's world ever since they released their adrenaline-charged anthem, *Hypa Hypa*, in 2020. A perfect blend of EDM anthemia and brutal metalcore, it had an immediate impact, but it was the song's ridiculous mullet-shaking, crotch-thrusting, moustache-stroking video that turned them into viral sensations, clocking up 26 million views and counting on YouTube – and since then, it's been a rollercoaster.

Hilarious music videos for singles *We Got The Moves* (concept: pigeon-neck bopping and bush trimming) and *Pump It* (tight lycra and getting swole) followed, the band pitching the latter as Germany's Eurovision 2022 entry, although it was turned down – a decision that presumably haunts the German judges to this day, given their lacklustre final entry ended up with nil points.

It's all indicative of the increasing momentum that has seen the band boosted from small venues to sold-out arenas in a matter of months. Today we're hanging out with them in an arena, while their 2023 tour schedule now includes a stop at London's iconic Brixton Academy – hold up, how the fuck did this happen?!

"I think we released *Hypa Hypa* at the right time," says affable bearded singer Nico Sallach, trying to explain the band's sudden jump in popularity. "Everyone was pretty fucked up because of the pandemic, and while a lot of bands wrote songs that were really deep and melancholic, we just wanted to do something fun and put a smile on people's faces. 'The first scene [in the video], when we turned around with the little jump, that was something we didn't plan. It was just spontaneous.'"

"The song told us what the video would look like," adds co-vocalist, keyboardist and all-round goofball Kevin Ratajczak. "We said, 'We need palm trees! We need lights! We need a FERRARI! We need a roller girl!'"

He first became aware of the band's steep upward trajectory when he noticed the video views rising at warp speed while he was on holiday in the Netherlands in 2020, and admits he's been running to catch up ever since. "I don't even dare to move anything," he says, motioning in disbelief to the arena's swanky, spacious dressing room, where we sit perched on leather couches, mere hours away from Electric Callboy's biggest headline show to date. "Everybody thinks we take all this for granted. Like, it must be OK and totally normal for us. But it's absolutely not."

Ahead of releasing their sixth album, *Tekkno*, in September, today also marks the day of the band's inaugural Escalation Festival, where they are topping a self-curated bill of genre-hopping, mostly German bands, including Samurai Pizza Cats – which includes EC guitarist Daniel Haniß – Annisokay and 257ers. It's an event they have serious plans for, excitedly telling us they're already looking ahead to next year when they hope to take it outdoors.



A Vogue covershoot seems just around the corner for these trend-setters



Victory is indeed theirs



Surf's up!



Enjoying the breeze

Rammstein, they ain't.
But they are hella good fun



As Nico passes us a neon can of 'Electric Callbeer' emblazoned with the band's faces – “a gift from the venue” to mark the occasion – it hits us just how far the band have come since they started out in the town of Castrop-Rauxel 12 years ago, as a fairly basic screamo band peddling juvenile metalcore about sex and booze that was embraced by few outside of their home country. After spending a decade slogging around youth centres in Europe, everything changed in February 2020 when their previous singer, Sebastian 'Sushi' Biesler, left the band and was replaced by Nico, a long-time friend whose former band, To The Rats And Wolves, had just announced their split.

“WE NEED PALM TREES! WE NEED A FERRARI!”

KEVIN RATAJCZAK, CO-VOCALIST / KEYBOARDIST

Watching them together now, it's clear Nico and Kevin have developed an unbreakable bond as they joke around, often finishing each other's sentences, totally on the same page. *Hypa Hypa* was the first song the new line-up wrote together, and it set the tone for their vibrant, fun new chapter. “We have some serious songs,” argues Kevin, when we ask if they're worried they might get pigeonholed as a novelty. “It's not that we think there are no problems in the world, but we are not the right band to tackle them. Our power and talent is making people forget about their problems, just for a couple of minutes.”

Noting how the band's music has brought people together, he smiles, referring to the hordes of fans braving the 34° heat outside the arena dressed in homage to the *Pump It* video.



“So many people come to the shows dressed like us in the moustache and the wigs.”

Nico nods in agreement. “A moustache is the sexiest thing in the whole world.”

An hour before our chat, we watch as the band have their photo taken for this feature, outside the arena. Egging each other on, between high kicks, muscle flexes and general silliness, they pose together for group shots, looking every inch a proper gang. It's a world away from 2020, Kevin tells us, when the breakdown in relationships and creative spirit almost forced them to quit.

“It ended up in a total crappy situation where no one was comfortable anymore,” he remembers of the recording sessions for the band's 2019 album, *Rehab*, their last record with singer Sushi. “I counted down the minutes until we could leave the studio and go home. I mean, it had some cool songs on it and we can be satisfied with the music, but it was not from the heart. It was pure work.”

Giving new meaning to 'flamehaired'...



What went wrong?

"It was very heavy to deal with our old singer," Kevin continues. "It was always the same situation. Five guys agreed and the one disagreed. And it was so hard to deal with each other that you couldn't even focus on the music anymore."

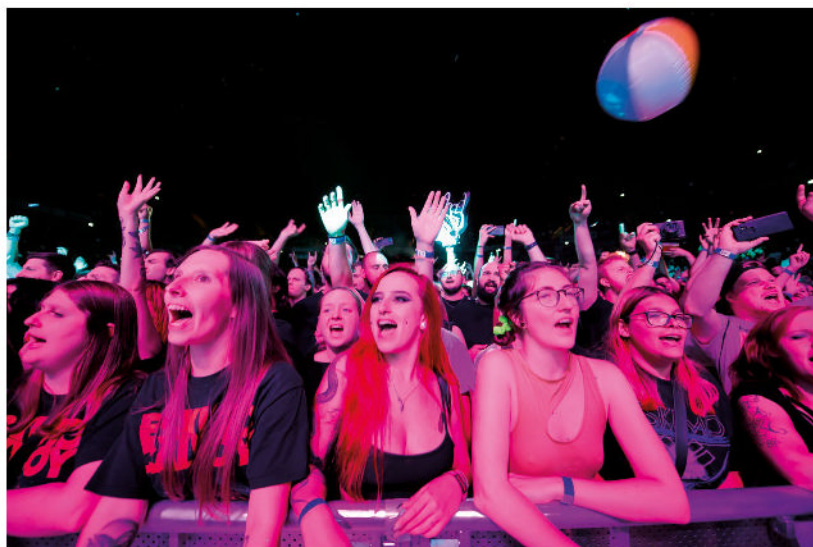
Accounts of how Sushi departed the band differ depending on who you talk to. "From his point of view, of course, he left us," Kevin shrugs. "For us, we kicked him out."

He and Sushi haven't spoken since. "I don't want to talk shit about him at all. He's doing his thing. We're doing our thing. Everybody's happy, so it's the best situation for everybody."

Kevin credits Nico's arrival with bringing "an easiness" back into the ranks, although there was further change to come. In December 2021, the band announced via Instagram that they would be removing some of their old material from official online platforms, due to offensive lyrics (case in point, 2010's *Monsieur Moustache vs. Clitcat*: 'Rub her clit, cumshot tits / On dirty backseats in Mom's car' – and these are the lyrics we can print).

"I don't even want to say too much about those songs," says Kevin, shifting uncomfortably in his seat. "When we created them, it was 2010 and we were little boys in the studio."

He admits that the band's distasteful approach had been mostly for shock value. "This is not an excuse, and shouldn't be an excuse, but the world has changed completely and it's good."



At the same time, the band announced that, following comments from fans, they were considering changing their name from their previous moniker, Eskimo Callboy, acknowledging the word was unacceptable and widely accepted as a slur towards the Inuit community. Making their process of self-reflection as transparent as possible, they posted educational videos, bringing their fans along on the journey, finally changing their name to Electric Callboy in March 2022. It was a serious side to the band many fans had not seen before.

"There were bands who said, 'If [Electric Callboy] play this festival, we won't,'" says Nico, although the band maintain that there was much more behind the brand change than just fear of damage to their burgeoning success.

"It was actually more an ideological reason," says Kevin. "With increasing popularity, we had more responsibility."



Electric Callboy (left to right): Daniel Klosek, Pascal Schillo, Nico Sallach, Kevin Ratajczak, Daniel Haniss, David Friedrich

Our band, and music in general, has always been there to connect people and we absolutely realised we split people with this."

"For me, our name is Electric Callboy, that's it," continues Nico firmly. "If there are people out there who are saying, 'For me it will always be the other name,' then a really big fuck you, because that is not the way."

With our interview over, the clock slowly ticks down to show time. We watch as bandmembers in varying states of nerves, rails of sequin shirts and wigs start making their way out of the dressing room and towards the stage. Then before you know it, it's time. As AC/DC's *Thunderstruck* blares from the speakers, the boys, who have changed into in 80s shell suits and sweatbands, get in the zone. There's time for one last huddle before the curtain covering the stage drops to the floor, and in a hailstorm of neon confetti, the band tear into *Pump It* and all hell breaks loose.

"A MOUSTACHE IS THE SEXIEST THING IN THE WORLD"

NICO SALLACH, FRONTMAN

Immediately, we're struck by just how much this feels like a community, as fans from all ages and walks of life – parents with kids, fans of metal, dance and everything in between – are flung together into one massive, raving, moshing Europop party, and suddenly, Electric Callboy's position as metal's most unlikely success story doesn't seem that strange at all.

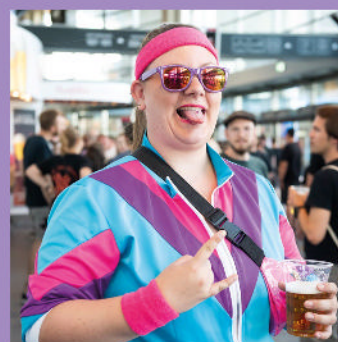
"A big plus of our band was we were always allowed to do whatever we want. We're a living playlist," Kevin tells us, explaining that while they'll never take themselves seriously, the music is another matter. "Our music and our videos and shows are bringing people together; there are no boundaries anymore."

"I think we can be pretty proud of ourselves," agrees Nico. "We've achieved a lot of things but I'm still hungry. I just don't want it to stop." **H**

**TEKKNO IS OUT NOW VIA CENTURY MEDIA.
ELECTRIC CALLBOY TOUR THE UK FROM
SEPTEMBER 23, AND PLAY LONDON'S BRIXTON
ACADEMY ON APRIL 30, 2023**



We asked Electric Callboy's fans why they're crazy for the band



"Electric Callboy are pure party. Pure escalation. I've been listening to them for five years, since they had their old singer. I really like metalcore and the electronic beats in their music. Nico is very good, how he sings the new songs and the old songs."
Rebecca, 30

"I've been a fan from the first album. Nico Sallach is better than Sushi. The sound of his voice is great and the new songs are back to the roots. It's a good mix of the old and the new."
Nico, 26



"I discovered Electric Callboy when *Hypa Hypa* went viral in 2020 during the lockdown. I love the dance music side of it – back in the 90s, [techno veterans] Scooter also had a hit with a song called *Hyper Hyper*, which I think pretty much every German is a fan of. But I also love the metal breakdowns."
Falk, 44

"We're both huge fans and have been listening to them together for about a year. This was a gift for Vito's 10th birthday – it's his first really big concert, so we're very excited!"
Julia, 38 and Vito, 10



GAEREA

URBAN HYMNS

Porto isn't a black metal city, so how did it spawn rising phenomenon Gaerea? We tracked down their anonymous frontman to talk about tourism, creepy masks and burning people alive

WORDS: JONATHAN SELZER • PICTURES: CATARINA ROCHA





The Mosteiro de São Bento da Vitória overlooks Porto's Douro River, the grids of arches set into its outer walls illuminated at night, reminiscent of a necropolis rather than a monastery. For the visitor, Porto feels like a city full of mysteries. The centuries-old buildings towering on the hills, the cobbled side streets and alleys, and the hidden-away, late-night bars are an ongoing dialogue between the old world and a cosmopolitan new. It's the place that birthed enigmatic black metallers Gaerea.

"We do get a lot of inspiration from the city," says their unnamed frontman as we chat in a central hotel. "Porto is growing to be a very utopian city, but also one where some streets aren't ours

anymore. Some streets are just for tourists, and it's really taking a toll on the cultural aspect of the city. It's not an old city anymore, it's an old city that paints itself in different colours to please others."

For Gaerea's frontman and mastermind – he's unwilling to publicly reveal his name, although it's not impossible to sleuth online – these ever-shifting alliances are both a frustration and a muse, the backdrop for a band whose emotionally searing, expansively unorthodox take on black metal is

rapidly gaining fans from all corners of the metal scene.

"Our way of being inspired by the city is to go to all the different alleys, all the different old towns, and watch the people living, complaining and experiencing this very old-school life," he says.

Gaerea aren't a band that you just listen to – they're one you inhabit. From their 2018 debut, *Unsettling Whispers*, through to 2020's reputation-ratcheting *Limbo*, to the imminent, senses-shattering *Mirage*, all of their albums have documented a singular world they've created for themselves – a vision of their home city mapped out onto new, metaphysical terrain.

There's a narrative running throughout, focusing on a society of 'lost creatures' who, at the end of *Limbo*, finally achieve their goal of self-annihilation by walking en masse into the sea. In an act of ontological cruelty, *Mirage* resurrects them, the protagonists believing they're alone, seeking salvation once more, but from states of isolation.

Sitting in the reading room of a pueblo-style yet modern hotel, and unobscured by the ornate, sigil-bearing masks that have become his band's immediately recognisable hallmark, the singer isn't the kind of artist who has any imperious air about him. You can sense the capacity for goofiness when he's talking to his bandmates, but there's an intensity that comes in whenever he's discussing a band that, for him, has become a life project.

Although wedded to black metal ideals – as the singer says, "Black metal is the only genre where I truly feel that freedom and artistic liberation" – the power of *Mirage* is that

it doesn't need to be heard as a black metal album. From the heart-heavy intro of the album's opening track, *Memoir*, glimmering like a torchlight illuminating ruins, through to the scarred humanity caught up in *Salve*'s turbulent whorls, and the title track's glimpses of Isis-esque, post-rock decadence, it's an album that transcends scene and genre. Having worked as a video director, it's unsurprising that the frontman has built a sonic universe whose threshold you cross with an indelible, red-pill sense of revelation.

"We write albums as if they were film scripts," he explains. "It's the way I imagine all of these worlds. Each of the songs on *Mirage* is a specific episode in different people's lives, and I have all the shots as if it was a music video in my head. It's how I see this band, and it really bleeds through on all our visuals and how we present ourselves. I can see the whole movie in front of my eyes, and it's what makes it authentic for me. If I can see all the details of these lyrics, then these songs, the art and the scenarios are real."

If their debut was an overview of their fictional society as a whole, and *Limbo* was told from the point of view of the characters, *Mirage* returns to the perspective of the observer. Its individual, solipsistic tales create a tapestry of vast, devastating scope.

"All the characters in this album are based on people that we either saw or got to know on the road," explains the frontman. "The song *Deluge* is about a guy we see every two years when we record our albums in this very secluded town in the centre of Portugal. It's just old people going to the

central café, but we see this guy every day, sitting in his car just watching the café.

"For me, all of these stories have different sides. It's sadness or loneliness, but also curiosity. And so with all these different characters, we ask: how could this person function in the world that we created for this band? It's so

interesting for me to think about, and this album is about our struggles over our perception of this world: how we make sense of it, and how we reveal more of ourselves through our own reflections."

As visionary as they are, Gaerea never started with a defined mission. Originally a two-piece, but becoming a full band to play festivals, it was a tour of China in 2019 with Japanese BM legends Sigh, and being exposed to a society bound by alien rules, that fully locked in the concept of the band. That Gaerea emerged from a country not exactly rife with renowned black metal bands to become an ever-increasing cause célèbre is down to the frontman himself.

"You have to sacrifice a whole lot to make your dreams happen," he says. "We are a poor country and the mentality is to work a lot of hours, focus on getting a house, getting married, paying your bills. So it's hard to focus on art. But for us, it's a lifestyle. We've had to let go of a lot of comforts. We can't have a lot of things that young people our age already have, because we want to fucking do this."

Much like bands such as Watain, Neurosis or Amenra have their own hermetic code, where the boundaries between life and art are all but erased, so Gaerea have one of those rare, collective identities that feels like a totality – an aesthetic and an outlook that runs through every strata of the band. They've just made a short documentary to commemorate their fifth anniversary hometown show – perhaps arrogant for a band so young, but indicative of the purpose that

"THE MASKS HELP US GET UNCOMFORTABLE"

UNNAMED FRONTMAN

Gaerea (left to right): Don't
Know, Not Sure, No Idea,
No Clue, Who's That?



drives them on. And then, of course, there are the masks themselves, already iconic, steeping the band in an air of mystique, but serving other, more potent purposes too.

"The sigils are the symbol for Asmoday [aka Asmodeus, the Greek/Hebrew 'prince of demons' and representation of lust], which relates to the themes on our first EP [2016's *Gaerea*]. We grew up to be more urban than a ritualistic band – if we are ritualistic now, it's only towards ourselves and how we grow, and how we study human beings – but keeping them really stays true to the beginning of the band. It's something meaningful, something we don't want to lose sight of, however we evolve. While we're onstage, we start to sweat, we don't see shit, so the only thing we've got is our emotion. That's one of the key aspects of why we need these masks; it's to get fucking uncomfortable, because that's how you reach those transcendent moments."

With a cover featuring the mask cast in gold, *Mirage* is instinctively enticing, but it's a foil for what lies within. "Across the album, we burn people alive, we torture people, we just see people going beyond crazy. It's an invitation into something that you think will be a beautiful ride, but is actually a nightmare," the singer says.

With a devout following already, *Mirage* looks set to make Gaerea standard-bearers for the underground scene and beyond. But they're more than a cult band. Harboured within the skin-peeling riffs, erupting like a pyroclastic flow, is a contemporary plight that speaks to us all.

"WE TORTURE PEOPLE AND THEY GO CRAZY"

UNNAMED FRONTMAN

"We might not be direct on what we want to say, because I want people to dive into the albums," explains the frontman. "But it's very clear that we're talking about humans and about society and about urban life, and how lost we are in this overcrowded world where we have everything to not feel alone. All of our albums are about solitude and loneliness in a very strong and extensive way, and people can relate to it because everybody feels alone these days. It's not taboo anymore. It's something I think about so much, and try to figure out, 'How the fuck does this happen?'"

As immersive an experience as it is, *Mirage* isn't an act of escapism, it's an entreaty to open your eyes to the world around you – to get *involved*. Gaerea's uncommon level of dedication to their art, the deep sense of identity they've so meticulously crafted, is an opportunity to reacquire yourself with the scenic route, and through that, to feel as though you belong.

"Perhaps the great problem is that everything is so easy," the singer concludes. "It doesn't quite meet the challenge of working for it. You can take an Uber for five kilometres or you could just walk. You will see people; you might encounter the love of your life on that walk. Sometimes we just take real moments for granted, or don't even recognise them. If you just take shortcuts like we do today, how can you say you lived life to the fullest?"

MIRAGE IS OUT ON SEPTEMBER 23 VIA SEASON OF MIST. GAEREA PLAY THE GARAGE, LONDON WITH GAAHLS WYRD ON OCTOBER 19

Gaerea's frontman urges us all to recognise the "real moments" in our lives



For the stories behind the best albums and
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THE RETA1IATORS



"WITH A ROCKSTAR
CAST LIST AND
GRUESOME KILLS,
IT TICKS EVERY BOX
FOR METAL FANS"



The Retaliators is a must-see for fans of heavy music and extreme cinema. With a cast list that includes Five Finger Death Punch, Papa Roach's Jacoby Shaddix, Ice Nine Kills' Spencer Charnas, Mötley Crüe's Tommy Lee and more, plus a big dollop of good ol' fashioned horror and gruesome kills, it ticks every box for metal fans. Oh, and did we mention that it features actors from *Ozark* and *Game Of Thrones*, and is brought to you by Allen Kovac, producer of Mötley Crüe's *The Dirt*? As well as a score by *Stranger Things* composers Kyle Dixon and Michael

Stein, it has the other thing that every good rock music film needs: a killer original soundtrack. It features some of the biggest bangers by some of the artists involved, along with a heap of awesome bands and collabs. It's well worth investigating, to get you in the mood for the film. So, here's our track-by-track guide to *The Retaliators Soundtrack*. Hold on tight...

1 The Retaliators Theme (21 Bullets)

Feat. Mötley Crüe, Asking Alexandria, Ice Nine Kills, From Ashes To New

The theme song of the movie, written by Nikki Sixx. Some of the biggest bands in the game have given us one massive anthem to open proceedings, which boasts the crunch and riffing of AA and INK mixed with Crüe's penchant for huge hooks. A big start!

2 The Ending Papa Roach

A stalking, electro banger from the Californian legends. A remastered version of their song from 2019 album *Who Do You Trust?*, this features everything that makes P-Roach such a classic band: huge hooks, big riffs and brilliantly spat-out vocals from Shaddix.

3 This Is Mongol The Hu

A typically unique, brand-new track from the Mongolian folk metal heroes, showcasing their thumping mix of power metal and traditional Mongolian instrumentation.

4 Blow

Eva Under Fire (feat. Spencer Charnas)

Like an updated version of Evanescence's *Bring Me To Life* for a new generation, the unholy union of Eva Under Fire's Amanda Lyberg and Ice Nine Kills' Spencer Charnas is a beautiful thing. Heavy, epic and emotional, this has the lot.

5 Scars That I'm Hiding

From Ashes To New (feat. Anders Fridén)

The legendary In Flames frontman joins From Ashes To New in a pummelling yet anthemic tune. It's a big, bombastic number with a huge chorus, and we're always delighted to hear Anders' patented roar.

6 Tops

Tommy Lee, Push Push

Something a little different here, as the legendary Mötley Crüe drummer and the South African alt-rapper Push Push join forces for a modern club banger. It stands out on a rock-heavy OST like this one, but we dare you to try not to shake your hips to it!

7 Classless Act

Classless Act (feat. Vince Neil)

An old-school glam metal stomper from the new kings of sleaze. Featuring one of their

heroes in the shape of the instantly recognisable tones of Mötley Crüe's Vince Neil, this will transport you straight back to the Sunset Strip in 1986.

8 Darkness Settles In Five Finger Death Punch

As stars of *The Retaliators*, you'd expect Five Finger Death Punch to turn up on the movie's soundtrack. And *Darkness Settles In* is one of the most stirring tracks from their career-best 2020 album, *F8*.

9 Tired Of Winning / Ships In The Night Nothing More

With a massive, RATM-style groove, some super-catchy electro beats and a chorus that would get any festival main stage bouncing, the eclectic Texans have given us one of the highlights of the entire soundtrack. A proper anthem in waiting.

10 Wolf Totem

The Hu (feat. Jacoby Shaddix)

Another cut from the Mongolian crew. This time, the use of strings gives it something of a Western feel. But it's the vocal trade-offs between the four members of The Hu and a returning Jacoby Shaddix that really give *Wolf Totem* that sprinkle of stardust.

11 If Tomorrow Never Comes

Bad Wolves (feat. Spencer Charnas)

With a crushing riff and a chorus that soars skywards, this is as powerful and epic as modern metal gets. The LA crew also rope in Ice Nine Kills' very busy Spencer Charnas to add that extra little bit of grit to proceedings.

12 Living Dangerous

Tempt (feat. Dorothy)

Another dose of old-school hard rock, with the slick young New York crew duetting with Dorothy Martin from Dorothy. A perfect, feelgood, fist-pumping, celebratory rager, you'll have the chorus in your head forever.

13 Blame It On The Double

Corey Marks (feat. Tyler Connolly, Jason Hook)

The new school country singer-songwriter excels here, writing a hard-drinking, outlaw country anthem that fits the aesthetic of the movie perfectly. He ropes in Theory Of A Deadman's Tyler Connolly, and former 5FDP guitarist Jason Hook provides a killer solo.

14 For The Glory

All Good Things (feat. Hollywood Undead)

A mix of cowboy swagger and bombastic rap rock, *For The Glory* is an anthem of defiance. LA's All Good Things collaborate with Hollywood Undead, who provide a killer mid-song rapped section that does its best to steal the show.

15 Invincible

Escape The Fate (feat. Lindsey Sterling)

A modern metalcore stomp with plenty of lo-fi electro beats peppered all over it, the mix of the Vegas post-hardcore stalwarts and the eclectic violinist and vocalist is an absolutely winning combination. When Lindsey lets loose on her violin, it's a breathtaking moment.

16 Lifeline

Bad Wolves

Another huge effort from the Bad Wolves guys. This time, a monolithically huge riff gives way to a cleaner and more melodic sounding emotional vocal, but that typically harsh Bad Wolves guitar tone is never too far away.

17 Give It To Me

Classless Act

Another sleazy effort from Classless Act, this time they transport us back to the 70s and remind us all of classic Kiss and AC/DC. If you like big riffs, big hooks, big beats and big hair, this is the song for you.

18 IOU

Five Finger Death Punch

A brand-new song from Five Finger Death Punch, and we get them firing on their heaviest cylinders here. Ivan Moody sounds as angry ever, even in the more melodic verses, and we even get a few electronic pulses beneath their riff-heavy attack.

20 Silent Night

Bleeker

Yes, it's a cover of the classic Christmas carol from Canadian rock band Bleeker. *The Retaliators* is set in December, and could become a Christmas favourite, like *Die Hard* but for horror fans. Yippee Ki-Yay, metal lovers.

21 Girls, Girls, Girls

Mötley Crüe

We're pretty sure you've heard this one already, to be honest! And if you haven't... well, prepare your ears for a treat! Yup, *The Retaliators Soundtrack* goes out on a high with this stone cold, gold standard Crüe classic. **M**

THE RETALIATORS IS IN CINEMAS NOW VIA BETTER NOISE FILMS FOR A LIMITED RUN – DON'T MISS OUT! FIND YOUR NEAREST SCREENING AT WWW.RETALIATORSMOVIE.COM. THE SOUNDTRACK IS OUT ON SEPTEMBER 16 VIA BETTER NOISE

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EDITED BY: JONATHAN SELZER • PICTURE: KATJA OGRIN

Slipknot: still putting the emotion into commotion



SLIPKNOT

The End, So Far

ROADRUNNER

Iowa's nine-man metal juggernaut fuels up on fresh inspiration

'ISN'T THIS WHAT YOU CAME HERE FOR?' roars Corey Taylor on *Warranty*, a savage call to arms halfway through Slipknot's seventh album. Five seconds later, a battery of drums and serrated guitars kicks in, leading to a whopping hook, and all hell breaks loose. It's a rabid reminder that, after 27 years of misanthropic annihilation, the world's most

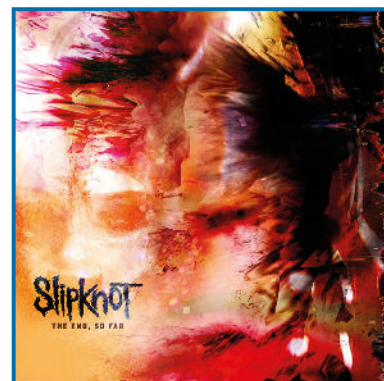
**"THIS VOLATILE
WRECKING CREW
ARE STILL
UNTAMEABLE"**

volatile, nine-man wrecking crew are as untameable as ever.

That said, it does raise a question: what exactly do people expect from a Slipknot record in 2022? Naturally, *The End, So Far* serves up plenty of maggot bait with frenetic singles *The Chapeltown Rag* and *The Dying Song* (*Time To Sing*), and the relentless *H377* lunges straight for the jugular with demented yet methodical precision and colossal choruses. But 2019's dark and experimental *We Are Not Your Kind* – a solid return to form after a period of patchy records – proved that almost three decades into their career, it's

impossible to predict where Slipknot will go next. Clearly, they have no intention of making it easy for fans this time around, either. Corey's summation of this album as "a heavier version" of the band's melodic and dynamic third record, *Vol. 3: (The Subliminal Verses)*, rings true in that this is easily the most inventive, ambitious and varied album they've put their name to.

Quiet, contemplative opener *Adderall* starts out like a haunted take on Radiohead's *Kid A*, complete with creepy keys and garbled FX, before veering into woozy Alice In Chains *Jar Of Flies* territory. It's unlike anything The Nine have recorded before. They pull a similar trick on *Acidic*, a track drummer Jay Weinberg talked up as the "heaviest blues song on



If there's a criticism to be had, it's that *Heirloom*'s swagger veers a little too much towards Stone Sour's metallic anemia; otherwise, the band break plenty of new ground. When they revealed the title of this album back in

FOR FANS OF: Korn, Code Orange, Machine Head

DANNII LEIVERS

This Californian quartet sit at an interesting intersection of molasses-thick sludge and pit-ready metalcore. The addition of vocalist/guitarist Nate Burman in 2016 helped that sound come into much clearer focus, and this third album is their best yet. Boasting a booming Kurt

ELLIOT LEAVER



Lamb Of God beam down onto new sonic territory

LAMB OF GOD

Omens

NUCLEAR BLAST

Virginia's groove metal beasts start to spread their wings

EARLIER THIS YEAR, Lamb Of God guitarist Mark Morton gave *Metal Hammer* a motherfucking invitation to the studio to talk about ninth album *Omens*, and he made a big deal about how eclectic it was going to be. "I think every song on the record has its own unique personality," he said. "They all do very different things." He's got a point. Sort of.

Of course, these groove metal heavyweights have never been the most genre-smashing force in the world. Nor have they ever needed to be. Ever since they rebranded from Burn The Priest, their USPs have been the same: scream-along choruses; Mark and Willie Adler laying down intricate licks over slamming snares; and Randy Blythe's poetically pissed-off lyricism.

But who's bitching? Lamb Of God's formula has rocketed them to the farthest heights of the New Wave Of American Heavy Metal. They've been Grammy-nominated five times, they've supported Slayer all over the globe



and they've sold more t-shirts than H&M. Probably.

At its outset, though, *Omens* lives up to Mark's vows of uniqueness. Lead single *Nevermore* opens with jagged guitar strums, each one trapped between the chug of fingers crawling at the far end of a fretboard. It's all a bit Gojira, or perhaps even Imperial Triumphant. Randy

also sneaks in the album's only passage of clean singing: a gravelly blues rock croon that – still, after 22 years – remains criminally underused.

Other tracks have that evolutionary verve as well. Unmask *Denial Mechanism* and you'll find a Bad Brains number in metal cosplay. The chords and scurrying drums are as basement hardcore as it gets, all wrapped up so concisely that it *must* have been inspired by Burn The Priest's 2018 punk covers album. *September Song* is a hemisphere away. It spans six minutes with dollops of NOLA-style sludge and, by the end, has flourished to a symphonic post-metal behemoth. It's easily *Omen's* apex.

The seven songs left are territory that's as familiar to the band as your dog's shit is to the back garden. That said, they're nine albums in; Lamb Of God are pretty good at being Lamb Of God by now. *Ditch* is a smoke-spewing groove machine, while the title track and *Vanishing* juxtapose one-word refrains with Randy's reliably astute lyrics. '*All this rising apathy, it's growing everyday / I can't pretend to care about how this will end*,' he roars, lamenting humanity's indifference towards the climate crisis. Sadly, *Ill Designs* and *Grayscale* can't kick ass anywhere near as hard, charging across the line from familiar to featureless.

So, is *Omens* the idiosyncratic masterstroke that Mark Morton promised? Almost. It's a halfway house between what works and some new sparks of experimentation. Its successes make the odd misstep all the more pronounced, but if this is the gateway to new sonic pastures for Lamb Of God, how can you not get excited?

FOR FANS OF: Hatebreed, Bleed From Within, Devildriver

MATT MILLS



CRONE
Gotta Light?

PROPHECY PRODUCTIONS

Bad mood music from Germany's gothic shadows

There is plenty of precedent for Crone's brand of dark, gently theatrical rock. Take the post-punk chill of Killing Joke and the chorus-heavy morbidity of Paradise Lost and Sentenced, add a little windswept, bucolic mystique and stir until thoroughly fucking miserable. This is much-plundered territory at this point, but the German quintet's songwriting chops have sharpened since their 2018 debut. The likes of *Abyss Road* and *This Is War* hinge on refined (dark) pop sensibilities that offset the overall atmosphere of morose tension. At times, Crone are almost arena rock-ready; frontman Phil Jonas aims for the cheap seats with his sonorous, fraught performance, particularly on the gorgeously overwrought *Waiting For Ghosts*. Not much light here, then, but plenty of velvety shadows to explore.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

FOR FANS OF: Grave Pleasures, Oceans Of Slumber, Sentenced

DOM LAWSON



DARKEST ERA

Wither On The Vine

CANDI FLIGHT

Northern Ireland's folk-infused metallers undergo a rebirth

After undergoing some changes both in personnel and their personal lives, this Northern Irish five-piece's first album in eight

years is an epic and enthralling affair. Their darkest, most dramatic offering to date, *Wither On The Vine* marks a growth in musicianship and songwriting, and the traditional, Celtic-minded bunch sound like a band reborn throughout. Front-man Krum's emotive and expressive vocals on opener *One Thousand Years Of Night* and the migrant crisis-inspired *Floodlands* are jaw-dropping. Meanwhile, the doom-flavoured power ballad *Tihonus* and catchy, Thin Lizzy-indebted *With Tragedy In Our Blood* are destined to be set staples. Saving the best for last, the gloomy, grunge-y title track ends the album in considerable style, and affirms that this new era of the band is their best yet.

FOR FANS OF:
Primordial, My Dying
Bride, Moonsorrow

EDWIN McFEF



THE DARLING FIRE
Distortions

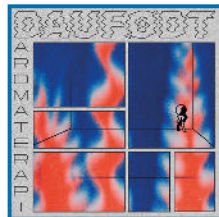
IODINE RECORDINGS

Atmospheric adventures from Shai Hulud/Poison The Well alumni

This post-hardcore quintet's second album blends elements of shoegaze and metal. It's hardly the most original concoction, particularly with blackgaze currently in vogue, but The Darling Fire utilise enough different elements to make them stand out. Jolie Lindholm's sweet, melodious cleans bring a sense of identity to the band, but occasionally her elegant delivery works against the heaviness underpinning her. Elsewhere, as on *Downer*, it brings grunge's knack for a great melancholy melody, but moments of *Amber* and *Clean Hands* sound too sickly sweet. They are,

however, adventurous, often evoking mid-late period Thrive's ability to create a giant wall of swirling sound. The Darling Fire could be spectacular if they refined a few key elements.

FOR FANS OF: Thrice, Oceans Of Slumber, The Rocking Horse Winner

REMFRY DEDMAN**DAUFÖDT**

Aromaterapi

FYSISK FORMAT

Nordic punk rock firebrands dial back the perkiness

Daufødd's last album, *1000 Island*, struck a number of nerves. They won a Norwegian Grammy, were able to attract producer Lasse Marhaug (Sunn O))), Thurston Moore), and vocalist Annika Linn Verdal. Homme became the online target of irked Norse billionaires triggered by her outspoken lyrics. The band rode its wiry, punky take on Kvelertak to increased public profile, and *Aromaterapi* appears to be the snotty oppositional response to being thrust in the spotlight. Where *1000 Island* oozed perky, anthemic punk angularity, *Aromaterapi* pulls the staccato shimmy back to include blunt 80s hardcore on *Religiøs Terror* and *Heksesangen*, the blackened doom of *Spy Blod & Dø*, seconds-long noise interludes and, in *Idealtid*, an 11-minute looped psychedelic jam. When connections to the band's high-octane past appear, as in *Knekken* and *Marerittet*, the feel is much more leaden and intricate, as opposed to previous fancy-free shredding.

FOR FANS OF: Big Black,
Kvelertak, Årabrot

KEVIN STEWART-PANKO



AUTOPSY

Morbidity Triumphant

PEACEVILLE

Oakland's godfathers of the fetid keep the wheels churning

AS DEATH METAL'S

original purveyors continue to hack and slash well into their 50s, demonstrating that this isn't "just a phase", the impact of and love for Autopsy becomes more and more evident. All and sundry sing praises for the Bay Area sickos in interviews, with musical tributes and tattooed flesh.

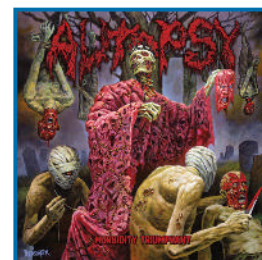
Sure, their discography isn't bulletproof (stand up or sit down, *Shitfun*... please), but since returning to active duty in 2008, it's been full acrid and fetid steam ahead. This might mean eight years between albums – although there have been a handful of EP and compilation releases – but it also means continued forward motion with hideously coarse, punk-flecked death metal, horror movie doom and grindhouse classic rock, all played with the delicacy of a wild stallion in a glass-blowing studio.

Album number eight puts their stamp back on the sickness as Autopsy's Jekyll & Hyde sound is executed with gunpowder energy and robust rawness. The galloping death thrash of *Stab The Brain* and *Maggots In The Mirror* offer delicious auditory disgust à la Possessed and Exhumed, with additional life given via Greg Wilkinson's compelling bass noodling, while *Born In Blood* sounds like an early Nihilist demo outtake. *The Voracious One* plays up a Sabbathian shuffle, whereas *Skin By Skin* slows that groove morosely to give Danny Coralles and Eric Cutler room to air out wailing, arena-rock leads. And then there are *Final Frost* and *Slaughterer Of Souls*, which combine both hideous worlds with layered, slow-motion crawls catapulted into chainsaw trotting and drummer Chris Reifert's uvula-stripping vocals.

But *Morbidity Triumphant*'s biggest triumph is how, even in its stripped-down state, it still blows away boundaries with riffs and sequences gussied up by four-string flourishes, gutter guitar virtuosity and Sarlacc screams that keep everything aurally interesting and palatable, but still odiously death metal.

FOR FANS OF: Repulsion, Asphyx, Obituary

KEVIN STEWART-PANKO





Clutch: keeping rock's frontier spirit alive

CLUTCH

Sunrise On Slaughter Beach

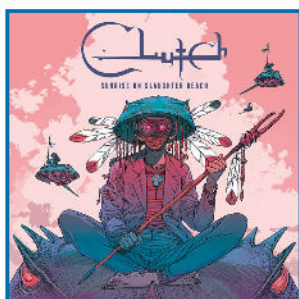
WEATHERMAKER MUSIC

The Maryland mob go wild. Again.

OMNIPRESENT, OMNI-BUSY AND laudably consistent, Clutch have always seemed slightly more devoted to the whole process of making music than everyone else. Either touring like madmen or blazing away at their Maryland HQ with another album in their sights, the band's last three decades have been a model of rock'n'roll purity and huge, life-affirming tunes. As a result, it comes as no surprise whatsoever that *Sunrise On Slaughter Beach* is another joyous conflagration of riffs, grooves and bittersweet wit. This is, after all, what Clutch do.

Nine songs deep and noticeably sharper and snappier than 2018's *Book Of Bad Decisions*, Clutch's 13th album offers a snapshot of the band at their most intense and energetic: almost certainly the result of being stuck at home and denied the opportunity to do what comes naturally. Widely showcased on tour this year, opener *Red Alert* (Boss Metal Zone) is a gritty, full-pelt return to undiluted rock fury. Done and dusted in under three minutes, it's the most punk thing

Clutch have done in years. Even more inspired is *We Strive For Excellence*: a jittery stream of Neil Fallon aphorisms tied to some of the simplest and most effective riffing Clutch have written in an age.



When the bearded frontman bellows 'Yes we do!' with absolute, gruff conviction, it's impossible to disagree.

On *Skeletons On Mars*, Clutch get their scorched earth space rock on, with acid rock swirls and a thumping, post-Hawkwind pulse. On the album's magnificent closer *Jackhammer Our Names*, they skilfully evoke the dusty drama of the Old West with a slow-motion groove that rolls like thunder and a sublime Neil Fallon vocal that oozes world weariness. Best of all, *Mercy Brown* twinkles and shuffles, armed with a giant and unexpected chorus hook, and all the trippy trimmings.

The sun rises. Clutch still rock the most. You may go about your business.

FOR FANS OF: The Sword, Danko Jones, Green Lung
DOM LAWSON



DEADLY VIPERS

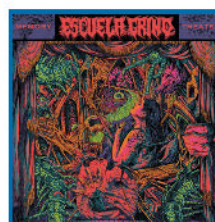
Low City Drone

FUZZORAMA

France's sci-fi fuzz rockers expand their sonic universe

Mastered by Wo Fat's Kent Stump, *Low City Drone* has shifted Deadly Vipers to more expansive and combustible tones. Yes, the fuzz is heavy, but the four-piece's individual elements now have a chance to shine. Fred's John Garcia-like vocals reverb over dexterous drumming before the crash and tumble of the magnificent chorus kicks in on the standout title track. Self-described "sci-fi fuzzy psych" rockers, the band stretch their instruments to new corners. The atmospheric interlude on *Welli Welloo* has tinges of 90s shoegaze and there's no ignoring the paean to Alice In Chains on *Last Rise*, making this immersive fuzz for cavernous venues.

FOR FANS OF: Kyuss, The Ocean, Truckfighters
HOLLY WRIGHT



ESCUELA GRIND

Memory Theater

MNRK HEAVY

Multifaceted hardcore grind from the Massachusetts mean streets

It would be wishful thinking to imagine a band whose moniker translates to 'Grind School' would pull an about-face and have their second album roll in on anything but sonic chaos and mayhem. Exclusively cranking out short, sharp full-throttle shocks has, however, made way for the comparative maturity of traditionally

structured songs that flirt with the three-minute mark. *Memory Theater's* 20-odd minutes utilise a thicker and lower sonic spectrum rife with feedback, fret slides, barre chord abuse and punchy staccato flourishes. It's all forcefully massaged into mosh parts, death blasts, thrashy ambling and sludgy doom muscle memory to deliver a multifaceted album that goes beyond 'fast and faster' simplicity.

FOR FANS OF: Wormrot, Pig Destroyer, Nasum
KEVIN STEWART-PANKO



EVEREST QUEEN

Murmurations

TREPANATION RECORDINGS

Hertfordshire post-metallers start eyeing up the peaks

The second album from these ambitious post-metallers sees them maintaining the base camp they established with 2019's *Dead Eden* while digging out some more vertiginous footholds. Everest Queen can ably conjure epic riffslides and wounded-Yeti roars, but that's their safe zone. After some fairly stock flex'n'chug it's the spaced-out shimmer of *Dormant River* where things begin to get interesting. *Divergence* then lobs in some tasty NWOBHM-esque noodle, while closer *The Burial* goes wonderfully off-piste as it morosely snorts the comet dust and campfire ashes left behind by Hum, Duster and US Christmas. It's here where the real money's at, and while Everest Queen might have a way to go before they reach the summit, the route they've chosen is already proving fascinating.

FOR FANS OF: Will Haven, Amenra, Inter Arma
ALEX DELLER



The Devil Wears Prada glow up on album number eight

THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA

Color Decay

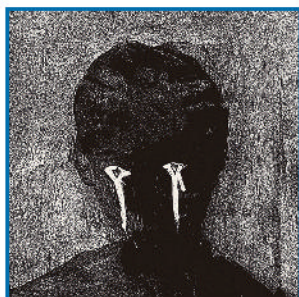
SOLID STATE

Ohio's metalcore heavies find more shades of mayhem

OVER THE LAST 17 years, The Devil Wears Prada have carved a niche for themselves making arty, post-hardcore-tinged-metalcore that always subverts expectation. The light and shade of last year's *Zombie II*, a sequel to 2010's monstrous *Zombie* EP, proved just how far they had come since the days when bludgeoning heaviness was the only weapon in their arsenal. But even now, on their eighth album, the Ohioans are finding new ways to challenge themselves.

The material on *Color Decay* falls somewhere between *Zombie* and the dynamism of 2016's *Transit Blues*, pushing the familiar into new realms. Each of the opening three tracks – *Exhibition*, *Salt* and album highlight *Watchtower* – are expertly structured to show off every aspect of the band's range, with huge choruses sitting aside filthy grooves and walls of dense, apocalyptic post-metal. This band's discography is littered with vocalist Jeremy DePoyster's excellent clean choruses, but *Time* is surely one of their catchiest, its glittering refrain nestled amongst spiky, serrated riffs,

breakdowns and glitchy electronic effects. The band know when to pull back as well as let go too; *Fire* bubbles along on spacey, clattering beats, while the doomy, back-breaking *Hallucinate* offers little in the way of warmth.



The quality on display is top notch throughout, but many of the album's most powerful moments land with vocalist Mike Hranica's poetic lyrics which, delivered in his distinctive, off-key style, pack real emotional punch. 'When was the last laugh we had?' he asks on

Twenty-Five, which contemplates change and the sad, slow decay of relationships – while for all its undeniable bounce, *Watchtower* is steeped in regret, Jeremy singing, 'I climbed the stairs / And we grew apart.' After years of solid and consistent evolution, The Devil Wears Prada have nailed a sound that ticks all the boxes: thought-provoking, anthemic and belligerent, *Color Decay* might just be their finest hour.

FOR FANS OF: Wage War, Architects, Northlane

DANNI LEIVERS



HEXED

Pagans Rising
VICISOLUM PRODUCTIONS

Sweden's symphonic metallers return to the dark ages

"Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" – so thought 17th-century Swedes, as hundreds of women were condemned to death. Symphonic metallers Hexed's second album reflects on this dark period in their country's history. Fronting them is the exceptional Tina Gunnarsson, whose powerful, gravelly voice is the band's focal point. *Stigma Diaboli* showcases a softer side to her voice, while haunting closer *Moorfield* has the most harrowing performance on the album. It's a punishing listen due to its anguished lyrics and thunderous pace, but it's also an intelligent, evocative record that's less fantastical than a lot of Hexed's symphonic peers.

FOR FANS OF: Eluveitie, Kamelot, Within Temptation

CATHERINE MORRIS



HOLY FAWN

Dimensional Bleed
WAX BODEGA

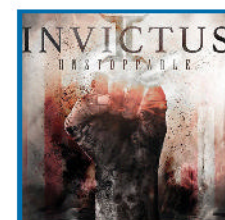
Randy Blythe-backed shoegazers unravel a multiverse of sadness

According to Holy Fawn guitarist Evan Phelps, *Dimensional Bleed* refers to "a concept of multiple dimensions and timelines that could exist simultaneously". Aptly, the Phoenix four-piece inhabit multiple dimensions at once, bridging post-rock, shoegaze and blackgaze.

It's a mix that's earned them a tour with Cult Of Luna and Randy Blythe flaunting their merch. Their second album offers more of what makes this band so great, especially when such tracks as *Death Is A Relief* and *Sightless* grow ever heavier without skimping on the sorrow. Plus, with co-producer Mike Watts, Holy Fawn sound more clear and crystalline than ever. Shoegaze's relationship with metal has rarely felt more seamless.

FOR FANS OF: Slowdive, Deafheaven, God Is An Astronaut

MATT MILLS



INVICTUS

Unstoppable

MNRK HEAVY

Kataklysm frontman get his hooks into latest project

Not content with fronting Kataklysm and Romans-obsessed project Ex Deo, as well as his numerous other positions in the industry, Maurizio Iacono has added another string to his bow with *Invictus*. While both of his other bands imbue death metal with a heavy dose of melody, fans may be shocked to see just how much its creator has embraced the lighter shades of melodeath and the metalcore sound that borrowed so liberally from it. However, if you're able to get past the earnest clean vocals of opening track *You Will Know Who I Am* and *Get Up*'s groove and overt belligerence, you'll find an album with serious anthemic clout that befits the no-nonsense defiance of its mission statement.

FOR FANS OF: Soilwork, Arch Enemy, Killswitch Engage

ADAM BRENNAN



KEN MODE

Null

ARTOFACT

Winnipeg noise rock maestros keep pushing the envelope

Canadian savages KEN mode have made it to the eighth album of their career and still their creative well is yet to run dry. *Null* is the band's first album with Kathryn Kerr on sax, synth and percussion as a full-time member of the band, and her position seems to have led the band to lean even further on the bleak, disorientating noise of Swans or Lou Reed at his more experimental. There's still plenty of sludgy, screaming catharsis on here as usual, but the amalgam of these two styles on the jaw-dropping, 10-minute-long *Lost Grip* shows the band in spectacular form, with chilling piano chimes and seething hardcore all taking the lead at various points to amazing effect. *Null* is that rare thing – a band decades into their career genuinely sounding as vital as they ever have.

FOR FANS OF: Unsane, Godflesh, Swans

STEPHEN HILL



LANGUISH

Feeding The Flames Of Annihilation

PROSTHETIC

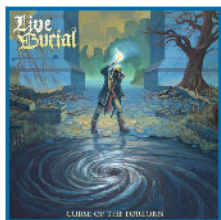
Death/grind devilry from the Tucson, Arizona tar pits

Featuring a member of death metal band-de-jour Gatecreeper, as well as two members of post-sludgesters North, Languish sit in that

turn-of-the-millennium Relapse Records sweet spot, but with an added beefiness. Boasting a savage HM-2 chainsaw guitar and a bag of equally savage riffs, they are by turns filthy but precise grindcore, bone-crunching death metal and all-round sonic brick to the head. The production is so thick Boris Johnson offered it a job in the cabinet. Think chunky grooves, but with added 'Wwwwoaaaargh!' and from the opening explosion of *Manifesto* to the closing dirge of *Corporate Dystopia* there's barely any let-up. Even when they do drop the pace to an occasional crawl, it still feels like being hit by a landslide. Oh, and the limited run of vinyl looks stunning.

FOR FANS OF: Cloudrat, Terrorizer, Pig Destroyer

ALASTAIR RIDDELL



LIVE BURIAL

Curse Of The Forlorn

TRANSCENDING OBSCURITY

UK death metallers take a wild ride into the dark

These Newcastle death metallers are at their most ferocious on this third album, with light-speed rippers like *Exhumation* and *Execution* tearing past at breakneck pace. The band's increased aggression hasn't come at the expense of atmosphere, however, with opener *Despair Of The Lost Self* delivering some truly haunting guitar harmonies and lead lines. Bassist Lee Anderson is an absolute demon too, with his expressive, nimble fretwork really adding extra layers to eerie numbers like *Blood And Copper* or 12-minute closer *This Prison I Call Flesh*, which harks back to the doomier days of their 2013 demo with its sinister riffs and

vocalist Jamie Brown's tortured, Martin van Drunen-esque howls. There's a much darker tone here compared to 2020's *Unending Futility*, which, when combined with the intricate, almost progressive songwriting, makes this their most complete and satisfying album to date.

FOR FANS OF: Cryptic Shift, Pestilence, Horrified

KEZ WHELAN



LOST SOCIETY

If The Sky Came Down

NUCLEAR BLAST

Finland's former thrash metallers chain themselves to a nu groove

It's hard to imagine this is the same Finnish band that went full-on thrash with their impressive 2013 debut, *Fast Loud Death*. Despite going on to fuel their fanbase with 2016's *Braindead* and slaying stages with Exodus, the release of *No Absolution* in 2020 favoured a more restrained, polished approach with cleaner vocals. Producer Joonas Parkkonen joins them on co-writing duties here and they double down on catchy choruses, precise production and strong industrial and nu metal influences. (*We Are The Braindead* screams Slipknot, *Creature* and *Hurt Me* weave in darker moods, and guitarist/vocalist Samy Elbanna displays his most vulnerable side yet as the album draws to a close. It's hard not to miss the former chaos and groove, but the songwriting is emotional and energetic, and the band's passion and talent shines strong.

FOR FANS OF: Bullet For My Valentine, Linkin Park, While She Sleeps

NIK YOUNG



Gaerea reach out beyond black metal's borders

GAEREA

Mirage

SEASON OF MIST

Portugal's scene-bursting black metallers recharge their Midas touch

EVER SINCE THEY

emerged as the bleakest thing in all of Portugal, you could argue on two fronts that Gaerea are black metal's most exciting band. On one level, this quintet scream potential. They have a signature look – each member is hooded without as much as a pseudonym – and debut album *Unsettling Whispers* was such an underground smash that it rocketed them onto *Season Of Mist*, home to Heilung and Abbath. Then there's the musical level. Gaerea have categorised themselves as "cathartic black metal" and that hits the nail on the head. Their aggressive yet progressive suites are always invigorating, pulling from the most primal parts of death and sludge metal to keep the violence fresh.

Third album *Mirage* is no different, yet it's by far the most eclectic of Gaerea's trilogy of beatings. The opening behemoth, *Memoir*, initially seems lifted from a Cult Of Luna album, plucking out escalating post-metal arpeggios. That is until a drop into the most immense blackness, where roars, tremolo picking and blastbeats all torrent at once. It's sudden and powerful enough to wake a narcoleptic. Meanwhile, *Deluge* is a marching monster of grooves, each slowed-down snare strike smacking like a punch in the face.

As much as *Mirage* takes inspiration from elsewhere, it's also a complete exploration of black metal's merits. *Salve* is a surging, tumbling, thrillride of a single that flaunts its genre's penchant for grinding melodies. Sure, it's a boot up the arse that kicks with blasts and roaring diatribes, but the guitars also whirl with harmonies.

Gaerea already have a reach well beyond the borders of black metal, and this album will only spread that popularity even further. Accessible and eclectic without compromising on the essence of extreme music, it's hard to think of a metalhead who won't be won over by *Mirage*.

FOR FANS OF: Watain, A Forest Of Stars, Psycroptic

MATT MILLS





Petbrick get their industrial groove on

PETBRICK

Liminal

ROCKET RECORDINGS

Igor Cavalera goes in for a mind-scrambling industrial mash-up

IN YEARS PAST, if a band issued an album that incorporated influences and sounds from across spectrums and genres, record execs would hit the panic button. Many readers will recall the industry furore over Faith No More's diverse masterpiece, *Angel Dust*. These days, the worry is largely about online and streaming algorithms choking out a band like Petbrick and an album like *Liminal*, because it's a record that doesn't sit still.

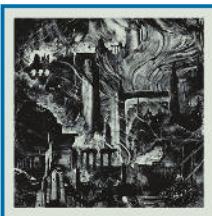
Comprised of Wayne Adams (Big Lad/Johnny Broke) and Igor Cavalera (Sepultura/Absent In Body), Petbrick make "horrible noises" and could be considered the directionless, residual material that didn't stick to the proverbial wall. Another viewpoint sees the duo's output as highly artistic cut-and-paste intricacy. Either way, Wayne and Igor throw the rulebook out the window like Putin does journalists (allegedly), in their deconstruction of musical linearity, simple categorisation and creative methodology.

A solid percentage of their second album's front-end utilises dismantled breakbeats and pulse-pounding gabba rhythms. *Arboria* sets clipped guitar and electronic percussion to herky-jerky tribal rhythms, *Pigeon Kick*'s assailing drone coalesces around a tapered thrash beat before *Lysergic Aura* slows things down for a Run The Jewels-type rap.

The album gets weirder and more abrasive as it goes on. *Damballa* is the sound of Slayer and Nitzer Ebb rehearsing in a Buddhist temple and *Ayan* is essentially a drum circle sired by Atari Teenage Riot instead of hippies. The guest appearances from Converge's Jake Bannon and Neurosis's Steve Von Till aren't outliers on their own as *Grind You Dull* and *Reckoning* are appropriate songs for them, but they add more fuel to *Liminal*'s scattered fire. Which isn't a bad thing, as the album kicks ass; it just doesn't do so in a straight line.

■■■■■■■■■■■ **FOR FANS OF:** Deafkids, Ministry, Mr. Bungle

KEVIN STEWART-PANKO



THE NECROMANCERS

Where The Void Rose

RIPPLE MUSIC

Gallic occult stoner rockers weave more moments of magic

Since forming in 2015, this French quartet have matured beyond their initial focus on dumber-down-Sabbath stoner chic. Following different paths across widened horizons, they've honed their chops, developed their identity and liberated their imaginations. On their third album the groovy 70s occult vibes still trail freely like wisps of dope smoke around the jam room, but they're augmented by arty shades of 80s goth rock and dirty 90s grunge – and delivered with progressive impulses across 38 minutes. The Necromancers haven't quite produced a standout hit for the ages, but they're full of satisfying moments.

■■■■■■■■■■■ **FOR FANS OF:** Unto Others, Ghost, Black Sabbath

CHRIS CHANTLER



NORDJVEL

Gnavhøl

INDIE RECORDINGS

Nordic black metallers fire up the juggernaut

After an impressively icy 2016 debut, 2019's *Necrogenesis* upped Nordjvel's intensity with the introduction of ex-Zyklon/Morbid Angel guitarist Destructhor and ex-Dark Funeral drummer Dominator. *Gnavhøl* relentlessly doubles down. Dominator is aptly named, so intensely do his blastbeats consume and dictate the assault, the

band only rarely slowing to bother with such trifles as atmospherics. From the outset of *IDjevelens Skygge* to the closing howls of *Twisted Psychosis*, *Gnavhøl*'s exhilaratingly fervent, devilish grooves and leads interplay with the perma-blast. From the maddening leads of *Within The Eyes* to the scarifying buzzsaw of *Antichrist Flesh* and the glowering leads of *Spores Of Gnosis*, there is, quite simply, zero fucking about. This is orthodox black metal delivered with zealous intensity.

■■■■■■■■■■■ **FOR FANS OF:** 1349, Gorgoroth, Belphegor

TOM O'BOYLE



OFF!

Free LSD

FAT POSSUM

Former Black Flag/Circle Jerks legend speeds through a noisy trip

Last heard on *The Metallica Blacklist*, Off! seem to exist primarily to embarrass younger generations of hardcore bands. Everything the Californian quartet have released to date has been blistering, nails-hard punk rock of the highest order. But while *Free LSD* takes a few more brief detours, allowing a little psych-jazz wonkiness into the mix, their sheer ferocity and velocity is street-bound to the bone. Frontman Keith Morris was a legend long before forming this band thanks to stints in Black Flag and Circle Jerks, but Off! are very nearly the proud equal, and he sounds as pissed off and plugged in as he ever did. The promise of cost-free hallucinogens may prove to be a nonsense, sadly.

■■■■■■■■■■■ **FOR FANS OF:** Black Flag, The Boneless Ones, Poison Idea

DOM LAWSON

WORLD SERVICE

Heavy metal uprisings from around the globe



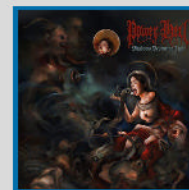
DEVOUROR

Diabolos Brigade

LISTENABLE

These veterans of Singapore's underground wear their influences on their sleeves, or rather the nailed armbands on their sleeves, which tells you all you need to know. Savage war metal.

■■■■■■■■■■■ **ALASTAIR RIDDELL**



POWER FROM HELL

Shadows Devouring Light

DEBEMUR MORTI

Masters of scabby purity, PFH have followed up 2019's *Profound Evil Presence* with another flawless salute to the black metal gods. Brazilian darkness at its raw, rambunctious and joyously unholy best.

■■■■■■■■■■■ **DOM LAWSON**



SÜLFÜR ENSEMBLE

/// SELF-RELEASED

Clearly in thrall to Mantar's febrile clatter, this Turkish four-piece don't lack in spittle-flecked energy or defibrillating grooves, the three tracks charged with punk energy and moments of palpating doom.

■■■■■■■■■■■ **JONATHAN SELZER**



OMPHAGIA

Rebirth In Black

UNIQUE LEADER

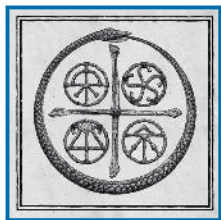
Zürich tech death metallers add more strings to their bow

As notable for their sharply dressed stage attire as their technical death metal assault, Omphagia's fourth album sees them take a far grander approach. Though lacking the full-blown ostentation that takes centre stage for Fleshgod Apocalypse and Septicflesh, there's no doubting the symphonic wall of sound that backs the Florida-inspired riffs and frantic changes of attack. While the portentous atmospheres of *Redemption In Self-Destruction* and *Serve As Slave* add weight to their impact, the blistering rhythms, incisive riffs and Beni's assortment of vocals soften up the defences. Similarly, the Eastern evocation of *The Plague*, *Insights Of A Dying Man* and *Thoughts Of The Earth* don't just resemble Nile's idiosyncratic style on a surface level, but also have the dynamic proficiency to construct formidable death metal monuments in the process.

★★★★★

FOR FANS OF: Fleshgod Apocalypse, Nile, Septicflesh

ADAM BRENNAN



ORM

Intet • Altet

INDISCIPLINARIAN

Danish black metal maximalists push the boundaries of patience

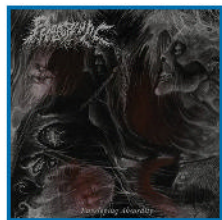
Shakespeare once wrote, "Brevity is the soul of wit." Orm once replied, "Get

fucked, mate." Probably. The Danes have found a niche in penning some of the longest suites in black metal, with 2019's *Ir* filling up 47 minutes using just two tracks. *Intet • Altet* is an hour-and-a-half double album with four songs on it. Of course, there's nothing inherently wrong with such titanic scope (Schammasch's three-disc *Triangle* remains hypnotic listening), but Orm don't have enough original ideas to keep investment high. There are standouts, like *Trance/Floden*, *Som Kan Lede*, which inflates from Godspeed You! Black Emperor post-rock to flamboyant NWOBHM licks, and the post-metal riff-fest that starts *Mod Døden*. However, most of this odyssey lacks identity and stubbornly marches on and on and on. There's no shame in cluttering up the cutting room floor, guys.

★★★★★

FOR FANS OF: Wolves In The Throne Room, Schammasch, Gaerea

MATT MILLS



PHOBOPHILIC

Enveloping Absurdity

PROSTHETIC

Philosophical, fist-raising DM from the frozen wastes of Fargo

Hailing from Fargo, North Dakota, these highbrow headbangers have been causing a stir in the US death metal scene with their dynamic, thought-provoking attack. Inspired by German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche and French writers Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, and driven by an ambition to embrace life's thrills and tragedies, their punishingly heavy debut is set to open minds and pits. Built on a bedrock of jazz-like precision and

drawing melodic influence from the late, great Chuck Schuldiner, *Enveloping Absurdity* is an exciting album that's loaded with hooks that'll stay lodged in your cranium. *Those Which Stare Back* is a big moment. Sonically and lyrically heavy, it examines suicide and survivor's guilt over the course of four cathartic minutes and asserts Phobophilic as serious death metal contenders.

★★★★★

FOR FANS OF: Death, Cryptopsy, Carcass

EDWIN MCFEE



QUEENSRÿCHE

Digital Noise Alliance

CENTURY MEDIA / SONY

Prog metal veterans settle for smooth sailing on stagnant waters

Ten years and four albums since joining Queensrÿche, you'd imagine that Todd La Torre would have long escaped the shadow of former frontman Geoff Tate. A much-needed stabilising force when he joined, Todd also brought fresh vitality to the 'ryche that helped them escape the moribund slump of their final Tate-fronted releases. This remains true on *Digital Noise Alliance* as songs like *Sicdeth* and *Out Of The Black* deliver fist-pumping hard rock goodies. But the main issue – as with much of Queensrÿche's output this past decade – is that it feels too stable. Middle-of-the-road rock replaces a sense of grandeur and incisiveness that previously helped the band shine. It leaves you to wonder: will Queensrÿche tread water forever or eventually swim for new shores?

★★★★★

FOR FANS OF: Fates Warning, Iron Maiden, Kings X

RICH HOBSON



Jacoby Shaddix makes a meal out of his performance

THE RETALIATORS

BETTER NOISE FILMS

Ice Nine Kills, *5FDP* and *Papa Roach* members indulge in a frenetic gorefest

THE LATEST MOVIE

from the Better Noise imprint's dedicated film studio, *The Retaliators* will certainly appeal to fans of both exploitation cinema and modern heavy music. It's the story of a pastor (a film-stealing turn by co-director Michael Lombardi), who, in the search for his daughter's killer, uncovers gang warfare, a rogue law enforcer and some flesh-eating... well, you'll have to watch the film, no spoilers here.

The Retaliators also features all manner of Hammer-friendly musicians indulging in, or suffering, some serious ultra-violence. Ever wanted to see Ice Nine Kills frontman Spencer Charnas fronting up to all of Five Finger Death Punch? Or witness Papa Roach's Jacoby Shaddix indulge in a spot of cannibalism? This is the movie for you. Tommy Lee, Bad Wolves' Doc Coyle, Escape The Fate's Craig Mabbitt and more all turn up at one point in an impressively metal cast.

Some of the musicians are clearly more comfortable onscreen than others, and that's maybe an indication of the film's broader problem – *The Retaliators* doesn't really appear to know exactly what kind of film it wants to be. At various moments it's a revenge thriller, torture porn, a gangster flick, a morality tale, a slasher and a zombie movie. Some of these stylistic choices are more successful than others, but by biting off a little more than it can chew, the tone suffers overall. Ultimately, and thankfully, the closing act is the high point, feeling like a wilfully OTT, grotesque, shocking and blood-soaked homage to *Evil Dead*.

It's not perfect, and the likes of Wes Craven and John Carpenter are hardly going to be troubled on the Masters Of Horror podium, but you'll surely walk away from *The Retaliators* having been sated if you desire high-octane brutality and the kind of kills that will have you spitting out your popcorn in surprise.

★★★★★

FOR FANS OF: Ice Nine Kills, Papa Roach, eyeball abuse

STEPHEN HILL





Sonja's Melissa Moore breaks the chains of her black metal past

SONJA *Loud Arriver*

CRUZ DEL SUR MUSIC

Former Absu guitarist embarks on a journey of transformation

LOUD ARRIVER MARKS the first full-length release from former Absu guitarist Melissa Moore since being ousted from the band in 2017 – soon after telling them that she was trans. Drummer Grzesiek Czaplă, allegedly the only member to show support, joins her alongside bassist Ben Brand for a three-piece that harnesses extreme metal roots to give their anthemic take on classic heavy metal a keen cutting edge.

The brainchild of Melissa and Grzesiek, Sonja began in 2014, with *Loud Arriver* recorded by 2019, only for their plans to be scuppered by the pandemic. In the interim, Melissa released a demo with her death/black metal outfit Crossspitter, the lo-fi extremity having much more in common with Absu than the significant departure that Sonja marks. It's a symbol of emergence that has evidently proved cathartic for Melissa, who debuts as lead vocalist on the record.

She has a peeling clean vocal capable of impressive falsettos that, alongside some standout trad metal riffing, proves

the focus for a record that's stuffed full of killer moments.

When The Candle Burns Low... introduces its themes and motifs gradually, its melancholia blown apart by *Nylon Nights*, where the riffs really kick in – all leather-clad, hook-laden and looking for trouble. *Pink Fog* follows, built on the kind of staccato riff alarum that embeds itself in your cerebrum to haunt you for the rest of your day.

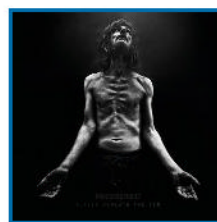
Only 38 minutes long, *Loud Arriver* remains taut to the last, *Daughter Of The*

Morning Star proving an exultant late album rouser. Trad metal's tropes are long established, and it takes a unique expression to instil a sense of present danger rather than nostalgia.

Documenting her struggle from suppression through fear, hostility and abandonment to a position of retaliatory indignance, *Loud Arriver's* inflammatory vigour sets its arsenal of riffs ablaze.

FOR FANS OF: Sumerlands, Unto Others, Eternal Champion

TOM O'BOYLE



PROCESS OF GUILT *Slaves Beneath The Sun*

ALMA MATER

Bleak, harrowing post-sludge with a hard-won payoff

The fifth full-length album from this Portuguese post-sludge quartet is a grim and desolate affair. Once second track *Scars* comes in, it's clear that Process Of Guilt fuse post-metal experimentation with the attack of a hypnotically punishing brand of death metal. It's not quite as distinct as, say, Oranssi Pazuzu, but the sheer bowel-quaking intensity that the band amass pulls them through. The near-10-minute title track builds around a demonic choir straight out of the Behemoth playbook while retaining the bleak melancholy permeating the record. *Slaves Beneath The Sun* is a relentlessly bleak 44 minutes with rich rewards to be reaped from those who can stomach it.

FOR FANS OF: Cult Of Luna, Neurosis, Wolves In The Throne Room

REMFRY DEDMAN



REVOCATION *Netherheaven*

METAL BLADE

Boston death/thrashers bridge the old/new-school divide

Boston veterans Revocation are eight albums deep, and it's safe to say they have found their stride. Their metal is technical enough to keep things interesting without losing sight of the power of the riff; for all its twists and turns, *Netherheaven* remains

catchy, mixing old-school death crunch with a modern sonic approach. Guitars are suitably face-melting and the drumming is sharper than a scalpel. *Re-Crucified* sits somewhere between Morbid Angel and Neuraxis, while *Strange And Eternal* would fit on many a modern thrash album. Revocation are part thrash, part death and all-out ferocious.

FOR FANS OF: Neuraxis, Sylosis, Fallujah

ALASTAIR RIDDELL



SOWULO *Wurdiz*

BY NORSE

Dutch multi-instrumentalist proves not all Nordic folk lies to the North

While not as renowned as Wardruna or Heilung, solo artist Sowulo provides a similarly cinematic experience for metalheads seeking out the dark world of Nordic folk. You'll find no bloodthirsty Vikings or towering gods on *Wurdiz*; rather, the album is an emotional counterpoint to Nordic folk's more shamanistic elements, imbuing them with a sense of melancholy that comes off as almost doomy. *Begalan's* strings feel like something My Dying Bride may have used in the early 90s, while *Min Bân* swells to life in a neoclassical wall of sound that wouldn't go amiss on Lingua Ignota's *Caligula*. A meditation on the nature of fate and free will, *Wurdiz* is an expansive journey punctuated with metronome-like percussive beats, lilting strings and ethereal vocal performances that capture the imagination and settle deep into the soul.

FOR FANS OF: Heilung, Nytt Land, Rán

RICH HOBSON



SPECTRUM MORTIS

Bit Meseri - The Incantation

LISTENABLE

Eldritch, doom-clogged death from Spain's lightless underground

Beneath the heart of modern Madrid, hidden from the heat, lie miles and miles of tunnels and catacombs. From the moment you hit play it's obvious that Spectrum Mortis dwell among mouldering bones in this sprawling subterranea. Wreathed in incense, *Bit Meseri - The Incantation* really does feel like an incantation. It's cavernous, eldritch, metal of death so doom-laden you best have written your will before playing. Opening intro *An* evokes the old gods of the pre-Christian desert and *An-Enlilda* drags you slowly to Hell. *El Sol de Eridu* is perhaps the standout track of the eight here, but the quality never drops at any point up to the epic closer *Shamash*. *Bit Meseri* is an accomplished and assured debut from a band to watch.



FOR FANS OF: Necros Christos, Grave Miasma, Fuoco Fatuo

ALASTAIR RIDDELL



SPIRITUS MORTIS

The Great Seal

SVART

Finnish cult doom veterans recite from the scriptures

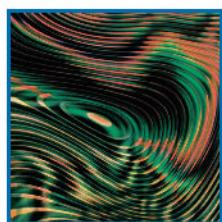
While they remain relatively unknown to most, Spiritus Mortis are Finland's longest-running traditional doom act. Formed in 1987, it took them 17 years to release their debut album, only

getting noticed when Reverend Bizarre's revered frontman Albert Witchfinder joined them another five years later. He may no longer be there but his replacement, Kimmo Perämäki, carries the flame with the same sense of drama, as does the music. The band's take on doom is still rooted in 80s metal, their fifth album bearing a grittier, more melodic and less occult approach and leaning more towards, say, Trouble than Cathedral. They may not be the slowest or the heaviest, and their attempt at adding a bluesier edge on *Martyrdom Operation* falls mostly flat. But when Spiritus Mortis go straight to doom's core as on final track, *Are You A Witch*, their experience pays off.



FOR FANS OF: Trouble, The Gates Of Slumber, Grand Magus

OLIVIER BADIN



STAKE

Love, Death And Decay

HASSLE

Resurrected Belgian alt metallers turn up the contrast

You might remember Stake in their former incarnation as the hotly tipped Steak Number Eight from the first half of the 2010s. The Belgian band were impressive as an early Melvins-esque noise punk band, and their name-change certainly hasn't led to any Samson-style loss of power. Their second album under the new moniker does show a fair bit of growth, with more restraint and a far better understanding of dynamics on display. On the more cerebral *Deliverance Dance* they simmer like The Cure for a few minutes before finally letting loose with some brutal blasting and an

old-school heavy metal groove that fans of Kvelertak will adore. That mix of light and shade serves them well, with *Love, Death And Decay* constantly keeping you on your toes. Score-wise, Stake deserve a number eight.



FOR FANS OF: Red Fang, Melvins, Part Chimp

STEPHEN HILL



STRATOVARIUS

Survive

EARMUSIC

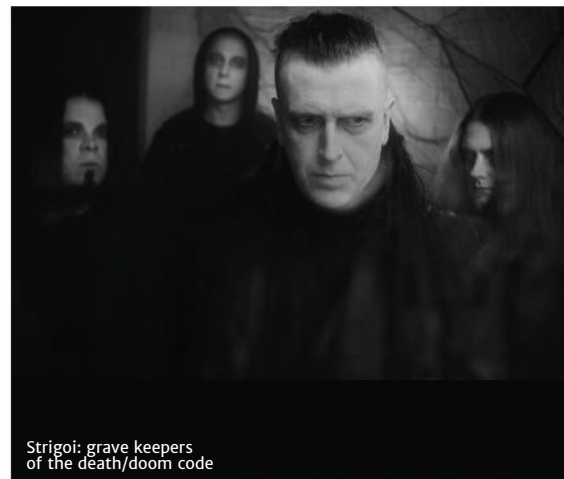
Prog/power metal linchpins make an exhilarating return from exile

From 1988–2015, Stratovarius maintained a hectic turnover of new material – even despite losing bandleader Timo Tolkki in 2008. After an unprecedented gap of seven years, the aptly named *Survive* is effectively a comeback album, and it's a textbook exemplar of the form. Seven years must have been just the right amount of time for the wizardly Finns to take stock, assess their strengths, finely hone 11 songs for maximum impact and get themselves hungry again. All the band's trump cards are pulled – the scampering twin guitar runs; the epic symphonics of organ legend Jens Johansson; the impassioned dexterity of Timo Kotipelto's voice; the anthemic songwriting; the elegance and panache; the socially conscious lyrics; the cinematic sound – and everything is nailed. Although Stratovarius's influence can still be heard in most modern prog-power metal, the OGs have been missed.



FOR FANS OF: Sonata Arctica, Dragonforce, Helloween

CHRIS CHANTLER



Strigoi: grave keepers of the death/doom code

STRIGOI

Viscera

SEASON OF MIST

Paradise Lost guitarist takes his death-doom obsession to the dark side

GREGOR MACKINTOSH, PARADISE Lost's guitarist and primary musical director since 1988, seems to have a deep, visceral need to get down and dirty with some creepy, crusty, old-school death/doom. For most of the last decade, that hunger was fulfilled by the veritable crust-doom/death-grind supergroup Vallenfyre, who delivered three enjoyable albums before grinding to a halt in 2018. Greg didn't miss a beat. He formed Strigoi that same year. The debut, *Abandon All Faith*, explored much the same punked-up deathly sludge terrain, but with a wider creative scope, less devotion to old-school rulebooks and a greater focus on atmospheres of queasy unease.

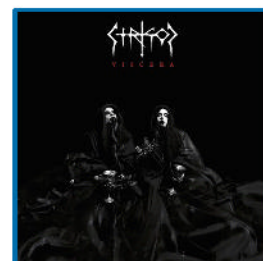
This MO has been confirmed and extended on second album *Viscera*, whose overall effect is neatly betokened by the monochrome cover photo of pallid ghouls swathed in black robes, quaffing goblets of gore. It's a savvy visual signifier for the album's enigmatic blend of arty elegance and sinister repugnance. Sonically, *Viscera* packs the mightiest wallop of anything Greg has done outside PL. Jaime Gomez Arellano (Ghost, Paradise Lost, Oranssi Pazuzu) brings a boiler-room intensity to the production, subtly layering various feverish edge-of-hearing noises guaranteed to incite confusion and paranoia when heard in the dark through headphones.

Unusually, the songs that perhaps best showcase Strigoi's greatest strengths are the last two: *Redeemer's* two and a half minutes of furiously primitive caveman grind, and monolithic eight-minute closer *Iron Lung*, self-described by Greg as "a song that feels that you can't breathe". It's an oppressive creepy-crawl back to the fetid contamination area of PL's *Rotting Misery*. As attested by the track *Napalm Frost*, *Viscera* is not above a bit of arch revelry in much-loved teenage influences. But where Vallenfyre records were predominantly a bit of fun, Strigoi have far darker priorities.



FOR FANS OF: Triptykon, Autopsy, Swallow The Sun

CHRIS CHANTLER





VENOM INC.

There's Only Black

NUCLEAR BLAST

Newcastle's foundational metal renegades steady the ship

WITH CRONOS'S VENOM still soldiering onwards, original guitarist Jeff 'Mantas' Dunn's incarnation of the band has also returned with their second full-length under the Venom Inc. name. Having re-enlisted *Prime Evil*-era frontman Tony Dolan 'Demolition Man' in 2015 to tour some Venom classics again, the trio attempted to prove they were powered by more than mere nostalgia with 2017's patchy *Avé*, a muddled collection of songs ranging from solid to awful. *There's Only Black*,

by contrast, is much more consistent; its highs may not match the vintage Venom riffery of *Avé's Forged In Hell*, for example, but there's also nothing as toe-curlingly embarrassing as *Dein Fleisch* here either.

Despite the more subtle, minimalist cover art, the band's sound is still as brash and bombastic as ever. The groove metal influence that crept into *Avé* is still here, especially on chuggier cuts such as *Rampant* and *Inferno*, but Manta's iconic riffing style shines through on sleazier numbers like *Nine* and the thrashy title

track. Tony's gruff bark is a lot more generic than Cronos's infamous snarl, but he turns in a dependable performance nonetheless, while gloomier tracks such as *Don't Feed Me Your Lies* and *Burn Liar Burn* give him a chance to show off some more evocative, emotive basslines.

As with every legacy act that ends up splitting in half, it's hard to shake the feeling that the ideal version of Venom lies somewhere in between the two and we'd all be better off if they'd just sit

down and iron out their differences. But while Cronos's Venom has arguably descended into self-parody in recent years, Venom Inc. feel far more robust and energised. There's nothing here you haven't heard before, but fans of that *Prime Evil* line-up will be pleased to hear this is the most powerful they've sounded in years.

FOR FANS OF: Venom, Motörhead, M:Pire Of Evil

KEZ WHELAN



SUMERLANDS

Dreamkiller

RELAPSE

True metal flag-bearers reveal their AOR underpinnings

Featuring three quarters of neo-trad metal saviours Eternal Champion, this Philly quintet's true metal credentials are beyond doubt. But on Sumerlands' second album their denim and leather skinsuit shields a heart of pure, shimmering AOR. The sharpened hooks and emotive force are well served by new singer Brendan Radigan, whose distinctive Ozzy-cum-Joachim Cans-via-Simon Le Bon high notes nail the imploring passion and storytelling fervour. With a bright, punchy sound and muscular delivery, *Dreamkiller* easily bests its predecessor, as Arthur Rizk and John Powers trade viscerally pleasing leads and harmonies.

FOR FANS OF: Iron Maiden, Scorpions, Ozzy Osbourne

CHRIS CHANTLER



TENSION SPAN
The Future Died Yesterday
NEUROT

Allstar Bay Area veterans give punk a dark, relevant twist

The presence of members of Neurosis, Dystopia and Asunder makes it easy to identify Tension Span as gnarly old punks of a particular vintage. Pedigree means fuck all without the music to back it up, however. Joyously, *The Future Died Yesterday* sounds less like another ephemeral side-project and more like the wholesale resurrection of

twisted, intelligent dark hardcore, steeped in the grand traditions of seminal labels like Alternative Tentacles and SST. Largely delivered at a bullish midpace, and with countless psychedelic intrusions and jarring media voiceovers, *Covered In His Blood* and the meandering, tripped-out title track are perfect, guitar-driven mood music for the fucked up, anxiety-ridden world we currently inhabit. Punk as fuck, but pertinent too.

FOR FANS OF: Black Flag, Butthole Surfers, Bad Breeding

DOM LAWSON



TERRAPHOBIA
Rise

DARKSTORM

Australia's death metal anchor digs deep into the old-school reservoir

Michael Jelinic is a legend within the Australian death metal scene, his time in Mortification sandwiched between his stints as the mastermind behind Terraphobia. For his main outfit's fourth record, he's brought his son David onboard as second guitarist, although everything else remains his vision. The result is a blistering 50 minutes of death delivered the old-school way. Full of the groove-laden riffs and trad metal solos that helped Death and Morbid Angel make such an impact, the likes of *Paralogical Delusions* and seven-minute closer *Screams From Hell* will be sure to give everyone's necks a thorough headbanging workout. A strong return to form for a man sorely overlooked outside of his home nation.

FOR FANS OF: Carcass,
Bolt Thrower, Obituary
ELLIOT LEAVER



UNTIL I WAKE

Inside My Head

FEARLESS

NY's fast-rising metalcore quartet over-polish their fangs

Buffalo, New York, metalcore quartet Until I Wake are hoping to build on the momentum that has seen them added to multiple Spotify playlists and receive over 10 million aggregate streams. There's serious potential on this debut album as well. *Inside My Head* soars when the band fully bare their teeth, such as on the aggressive duo of *Forsaken* and *Still Sinking*, and the breakdowns on *Octane* and the title track. The use of autotune on *Hope Ur Happy* and *Fake* is grating, though, and many songs follow the well-trodden metalcore structure of heavy, screamed verses and clean, melodic choruses. If Until I Wake keep things authentic and throw more caution to the wind on future releases, we could have an exceptional band on our hands.



FOR FANS OF: Architects, Our Hollow, Our Home, Thecitysours

ELLIOT LEAVER



WHITE HILLS

The Revenge Of Heads On Fire

HEADS ON FIRE INDUSTRIES

Psychedelic abandon on the streets of NYC

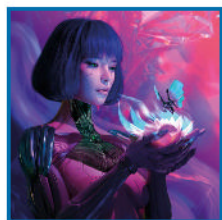
Despite two decades of lysergic activity, White Hills appear no closer to burnout than they were on their *No Game To Play* debut nearly 20 years ago.

Their latest captures the NYC psychonauts in a particularly extravagant and unforgiving mood, as their trademark blend of brain-spinning acid rock and endless, fearless experimentation is granted a broader and more spacious sonic platform than ever before. The spiky drift of mono-riff excursions like *Radiate* would have fitted neatly onto any previous White Hills record, and *Oceans Of Sound* is just about the greatest Hawkwind-via-Spacemen 3 rip-off/tribute most ears will ever hear. But it's the 21 minutes of *Don't Be Afraid* that really take the cosmic biscuit; an impossibly languid trip to some astral apex or other, it's White Hills' drugged-out ethos brought deliriously to life.



FOR FANS OF: Monster Magnet, The Stooges, Loop

DOM LAWSON



WITHIN DESTRUCTION

Lotus

ULTRA HEAVY

Slovenian riff monsters fully embrace the nu

Within Destruction's fifth full-length bursts with life, energy and colour that 10 years ago would have been unthinkable among their devout fanbase. By no means have they departed from their slam/deathcore roots completely, but it's interesting to see them evolve by taking a stronger creative stance since their 2020 album, *Yōkai*, as they double down and stretch their nu metal muscles. Embracing big choruses and a spectrum of synths that add a beautifully twisted industrial vitality to the record pays off for them big time. Tracks like *Survival* and *Nightmare* explore this fully, each

easily garnering a 'Banger!' seal of approval, while still managing to deliver jaw-clamping breakdowns that were created with the sole purpose of disrespecting your surroundings. Cathartic and bombastic as all fuckery, *Lotus* is the gift that keeps on wrecking.



FOR FANS OF: Death Blooms, Born Of Osiris, Crossfaith

HYWEL DAVIES



WOLFHEART

King Of The North

NAPALM

Heroic Finns take their place among the melodeath peaks

Wolfheart are one of the most underrated but consistent melodeath acts of the last decade, and the Finns' sixth compendium of heroic tales is once again given a suitable soundtrack. Opener *Skyforger* covers all the elements of the band's spirit, with scorching riffs that lead into irresistible melodies, all seemingly composed and performed halfway up a mountain on a glorious midwinter dawn. Enlisting Jesse Leach for the anthemic *Ancestor* gives *King Of The North* its most immediate feature. Meanwhile, Nile's Karl Sanders adding his guttural growl to *Cold Flame* demonstrates how heavy the band can get before unleashing those majestic peaks, which the string-led *Headstones*, *Knell* and *Fires Of The Fallen* scale in imperious fashion. Other household names may be spearheading the melodic death renaissance, but there's no reason Wolfheart can't be scaling the summit beside them.



FOR FANS OF: Insomnium, Be'lakor, Dark Tranquillity

ADAM BRENNAN

A.A. Williams enters a thrilling new phase



A.A. WILLIAMS

As The Moon Rests

BELLA UNION

London's immersive maestro returns with more tales from the depths

FOLLOWING A DEBUT

as stunningly assured as *Forever Blue* would give most artists cause for pause or wobble, but A.A. Williams has returned with a collection that confidently expands her sound and her creative vision. Recorded in a studio rather than A.A.'s

London flat, *As The Moon Rests* retains her previous works' intimacy while sounding fuller, lush and altogether mightier. There's a sense of drama and dynamics that speaks to the depth of her classical training, alongside the shimmer and crunch of the artists – Deftones, Nine Inch Nails and The Cure among them – whose music she reworked for her lockdown-born *Songs From Isolation*.

Delicate acoustic instrumentation glides in among the deft work of a string ensemble, while the brooding post-rock swell of *The Echo* and the malignant crunch of the title track speak to her kinship with Mono and Cult Of Luna respectively. A.A.'s voice glides effortlessly like a snake moving through pitch-black water: beautiful, supple and unnervingly formidable, and capable of conveying sorrow, hope and quiet threat as she charts a journey of self-discovery and self-forgiveness.

If *Hollow Heart* and *Evaporate* set out the album's scope, there's still much to discover as things slowly unfurl. *Shallow Water* suggests the tender shoots of spring flowers tentatively climbing up through the snow, and *Alone In The Deep* earns its title, giving off bioluminescent traces of Converge and Chelsea Wolfe's Bloodmoon collaboration while snatching the breath from your lungs. That the album only occasionally dabbles with 'traditional' heaviness while coming off as emotionally devastating and gloriously triumphant as the finest head-mulching riff fests is altogether thrilling. A fine testament to an artist who's as comfortable with artsy types as a roomful of Roadburn pilgrims.



FOR FANS OF: Year Of No Light, Anna von Hausswolff, Jo Quail

ALEX DELLER



LIVE REVIEWS

BLOODSTOCK 2022

CATTON HALL, DERBYSHIRE

Mercyful Fate and Lamb Of God turn up the heat at Derby's enduring metalfest

FRIDAY

In October 2021, ill-advised comments from festival director Vicky Hungerford cast a dark cloud over Bloodstock, as its commitment to inclusivity was scrutinised. After internally and publicly working to heal people's hurt and learn from mistakes, and with a promise to continue educating themselves going forwards, the Bloodstock team have renewed their focus on creating safe spaces, have partnered with Derbyshire LGBT+, and continue to work with the Sophie Lancaster Foundation. It's a welcome effort to listen to and support our community.

Opening the main stage and various pits, **RED METHOD** look like a carnival sideshow from Hell and sound like nu metal if it had burrowed underground and embraced dirty breakdowns instead of radio-friendly choruses. **HEART OF A COWARD** keep the momentum up, getting bodies colliding and jumping with their prog-tinged metalcore.

Over on the Sophie stage **INHUMAN NATURE** are stripping down crossover thrash to its most vital, volatile essence as the circle-pit resembles a post-apocalyptic war dance. Their cover of *Breaking The Law* proves they're plugged into metal's most enduring pleasure centres, too. **PARTY CANNON** are very, very silly. Beachballs, push-ups, frantic Euro-techno: it's all going on. Fortunately, the Scots are also one of the most devastating brutal death metal bands around, and *Nauseating And Unpalatable* is a certified tune. **BLOODYWOOD**'s long-awaited UK festival debut is every bit as uplifting and infectious as those viral videos promised. *Gaddaar* is a riotous opener, and the energy is sustained to the berserk, brilliant end.

An gasp is heard as **MACHINE HEAD**'s banner is raised on the Sophie stage. A genuinely well-kept secret, this is their first gig since the onset of the pandemic, and the profoundly frisky look on Robb Flynn's face says it all. Playing as a trio – guitarist Vogg is out with Decapitated – they tear through a 10-song set, including vicious new song *Choke On The Ashes Of Your Hate*, a murderous *Aesthetics Of Hate* and a closing *Halo* that reduces all present to a mess of sweat and tears. Welcome the fuck back.

After 38 years of twatting about, **GWAR** know what people want. There are multiple beheadings, at least one castration and frontman Blöthar The Berserker gets a blowjob from the Queen. They also play

some songs. Apparently. With members of Machine Head and Eyehategod watching eagerly from the Sophie stage wings, **DISCHARGE** put on a masterclass in hardcore punk aggro. A whirlwind of vitriol, the likes of *Protest And Survive* and *Hear Nothing See Nothing Say Nothing* show how Discharge paved the way for everyone from Metallica to Napalm Death.

It's guitarist Gary Holt's first UK **EXODUS** show in ages, but for a second it seems he's forgotten which band he's in, as he teases *Raining Blood* before jumping into *The Toxic Waltz*. Cheeky. Part of a thrash double-dose on the main stage, Exodus offer up violence in the likes of *Deathamphetamine*, *Blacklist* and *Bonded By Blood*, while **TESTAMENT** lean harder on thrash's anthemic qualities with *Rise Up*, *The Pale King* and *Alone In The Dark*. The unforgiving heat of Louisiana is scorched into **EYEHATEGOD**'s scurrilous cries for help, so British heatwaves are no biggie. Did we mention it's fucking scorching this weekend? *Blank* is an ageless, scabby-knuckled mantra, *High Risk Trigger* is a jolting elbow to the head, and Mike Williams comes on like a destitute Cruella de Vil fed only on nihilism. Bad vibes, all the time.

With their massive singalongs for the likes of *Colossus*, *Let It Burn* and *The Eagle Has Landed*, **AVATAR** build community spirit. But its Johannes Eckerström's declaration that "I'm so proud of what we have become" regarding the number of rainbow flags onsite that really makes it feel inclusive. The Sophie tent is packed for **SLEEP TOKEN**, but the audience rapidly dwindles. *Atlantic*, *Mine* and *Alkaline* are plenty moving, but fail to excite the crowd after a long day, and by the end the band are playing to a diminished, albeit passionate and vocally supportive, crowd.

SATURDAY

Masters of mad, angular noise, **PUPIL SLICER** are an absolute joy on the Sophie stage. Kate Davies is a whirling, effervescent presence, as her bandmates fire out smart shards of glitched-out grind. **CAGE FIGHT** come out fists swinging, not letting the heat get in the way of a good ol' fashioned beatdown. There is a deafening buzz around **LORNA SHORE**, and their Bloodstock debut confirms why. This is big budget, 5K deathcore, and thanks to near-perfect main stage sound, the New Jersey quintet tear the entire arena apart with ease. Greeted with a rapturous, heartfelt

applause, **JINJER** represent Ukraine with power and poise today. Armed with brilliantly unpredictable songs, Tatiana Shmayluk and her estimable comrades seize the moment, and everyone feels the love. Having long expanded from their black metal roots, **SAMAE**'s heaving industrial groove feels like Atlas playing volleyball, as the likes of *Slavocracy*'s pomp-swirled stomp fill out the Sophie Stage. **BURY TOMORROW** leap and dart across the main stage with all the pep of a pop-punk band. Their soaring choruses keep the crowd locked on word for word, before the lethal weightiness of the verses smack them all back into a session of straight metalcore worship. Playing the Sophie stage at the same time, **BLOOD YOUTH** deserve better than a minuscule crowd, but if their metalcore lacks innovation, it's always on-point and uncynical, and the breakdowns contagious. The battlejacketed child down front chasing the inflatable ball is having a blast.

If **DIMMU BORGIR** haven't always fully committed themselves to their live shows in later years, today they're like a returning, victorious army. Their swelling orchestral parps and Shagrath's commanding snarl could only be more perfect festival fodder if we were in the middle of a blizzard. Which we most definitely aren't. A braying crowd roars along to every mosh call and chorus in **MALEVOLENCE**'s set. It's a pressure cooker, with the sledgehammer swing of *Malicious Intent* setting off one of the weekend's most exciting sets, as they go from bruising hardcore to *Slave To Satisfaction*'s suffocating sludge and even soulful blues on *Higher Place*. Appearances from Lorna Shore's Will Ramos and Blood Youth's Harry Rule make it feel like a scene coming-of-age.

With respect to all the other bands, Bloodstock 2022 is all about **MERCYFUL FATE**. King Diamond and his henchmen are simply perfect tonight. From grand opening *The Oath* through to the grotesque monolith of encore *Satan's Fall*, these architects of infernal heaviness deliver on every conceivable level.

SUNDAY

Sunday is pink day, not because of poor sun cream application, but due to many of the crowd wearing the colour to honour Sophie Lancaster's late, pioneering mum, Sylvia. It's a brilliant sight in more than one sense of the term. Featuring Griffin Taylor and Simon Crahan, **VENDED** have plenty to prove

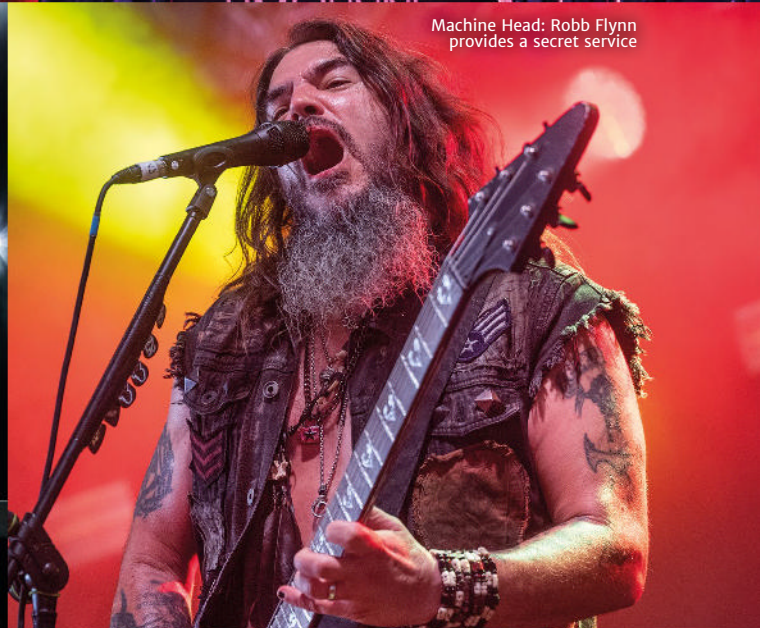
Mercyful Fate: King Diamond has all of Hell's bells, and whistles too



Avatar take pride in their arrangements



Machine Head: Robb Flynn provides a secret service



Cage Fight deliver a knockout blow



Gwar: don't try this at home, kids



Testament present their finest cuts



Bloodywood rock Bloodstock on their UK festival debut



Lamb Of God 1,
Heavenly God 0Dark Funeral find some
wildlings in the crowdBury Tomorrow are
having a blastJinjer: power
and poise

with their UK debut, getting stuck in with a familiar intensity that soon has pits whipped up into a frenzy. Though clearly raw, their set suggests great promise if they can bring some massive choruses. Bay Area legends **VIO-LENCE** have never played in the UK before, but thanks to a surfeit of scalpel-sharp riffs and Sean Killian's urgent yelp, they make their presence felt. *Kill On Command* is a monster in any decade. **VENOM INC.** kindly perform the legendary *Black Metal* album from front to back, peaking with a profoundly grim *Buried Alive* and a seriously unhinged *Heaven's On Fire*. Legendary drummer Nick Barker, filling in at short notice, looks chuffed. **CATTLE DECAPITATION** grab their main stage slot by the bollocks. *Plagueborne* is an unstoppable, demonic rush; *Death Atlas* is a darkly progressive colossus. Travis Ryan is a beast. The end. **DARK FUNERAL**'s route-one, big-showmanship black metal is as uncomplex yet refreshing as the Coors Light sold at the back of the marquee. You don't envy them in their mock-medieval armour in this heat, but the Swedes don't invoke spirits as much as raise them.

ILL NIÑO pull a strong crowd as they rip into the Sophie tent with canyon-sized grooves. *I Am Loco, Te Amo... I Hate You* and *What Comes Around* deliver nostalgic singalongs that have been in short supply across the weekend. **KILLING JOKE** are drawn from entirely different DNA to the rest of the weekend's line-up, but over four decades in, their post-punk tribalism feels more momentous than ever, as classics like *The Fall Of Because* and *Requiem* remain ageless, entrancing calls to arms as Jaz Coleman casually prophesies the imminent end of civilisation between songs. Juxtaposing glacially paced death-doom and all-out rampaging death metal, **STRIGOI** conjure a lumbering, abyssal beast, but with Killing Joke appealing to the same demographic, too few are there to see it and their set is robbed of some of its potency. **BELPHEGOR** pull a large Sophie crowd into their squirming black/death vortex, the burning inverted crosses enhancing the decadent, ceremonial air.

This is the third time **LAMB OF GOD** have headlined Bloodstock, but they're a spikier band than we have seen here previously. From a monstrous *Walk With Me In Hell* and a pitiless *Contractor*, to the closing two-punch nose-flattener of *Laid To Rest* and *Redneck*, they come back and conquer again, but with renewed intent and sharper teeth.

Is there a more celebratory way to end a festival than with **THE NIGHT FLIGHT ORCHESTRA**? Even in his lamé cape, beret and huge sunglasses, Soilwork's Björn 'Speed' Strid is taken aback by the sheer eruption of joy his Abba-infused AOR anthems invoke in the Sophie tent. It's an ecstatic revivalist event gone space-age glam, as the crowd form snaking conga lines and ensure Bloodstock's apex is one to remember through the ages.

DOM LAWSON/RICH HOBSON/

LIZ SCARLETT/JONATHAN SELZER

Sylosis are way past the larval stage of their career

Spiritworld: originally scheduled for high noon

KNOTFEST PRESENTS PULSE OF THE MAGGOTS

THE MILL, BIRMINGHAM

Slipknot-endorsed noisemakers rattle the home of metal

IF THE GALLERY of boiler suits and battered kegs upstairs in The Mill weren't a big enough hint, *Pulse Of The Maggots* is a Slipknot-endorsed showcase of up-and-coming talent, its inaugural event hosted in the Home Of Metal. Most workplaces have barely kicked out when **CAULDRON** come on, but that doesn't stop their sludgy hardcore inciting a flurry of swung limbs in the pit.

"This next song is pretty fuckin' violent, so we want to see some violence!" Don't let **THROWN INTO EXILE**'s fight-talk fool you. They're sweethearts really, singer Joey Dalo even getting the crowd to sing "Happy birthday" to his wife amid their thrashy metalcore. **ROUGH JUSTICE** ply the thugliest brand of hardcore this side of the West Coast, each song built around riffs you could lift trucks to.

As visceral as each act as been so far, there's a sense of uniformity

to their offerings, all three bands missing that singular X Factor that could truly push them above and beyond. Not so with **HERIOT**. Utterly annihilating from their opening blastbeat, they swing seamlessly from frenzied extremity to ethereal mystique – along with the likes of Loathe and Svalbard, offering an enthralling prospect for where heavy metal may yet go.

With the bar officially raised, **SPIRITWORLD** inject some flair into the evening. Arriving to a country song and dressed like glam metal cowboys, their schtick is distinctive to say the least. But when the old-school metal grooves lock in and swaggering guitars howl over the top, it feels like watching a chimeric fusion of Slayer, Power Trip and Bolt Thrower.

ORBIT CULTURE haven't even finished opener *Nensha* and the crowd are chanting their name. With the leviathan stomp of Gojira

and the infectious choruses of Trivium, they feel like born headliners, the crowd roaring along to *Strangler*, *Open Eye* and *Saw* with surprising gusto.

"We're a little dusty," admits **SYLOSIS** frontman Josh Middleton, his band barely making their comeback before the pandemic hit. It doesn't show on their incendiary set. *Worship Decay* takes off like a rocket and, across *Calcified*, *Texas* and *Conclusion Of An Age*, the Reading four-piece deliver the biggest riffs, the biggest pits and biggest singalongs of the night. It's a triumphant set, underpinned by a sense of genuine gratitude, Sylosis's return highlighting the fact Knotfest – and *Pulse Of The Maggots* – exists to highlight unsung talent in the same way Ozzfest did more than 25 years ago, whether emergent or criminally overlooked.

RICH HOBSON

ARCTANGENT 2022

FERNHILL FARM, BRISTOL

Opeth, Tesseract and Cult Of Luna spread their wings in the West Country

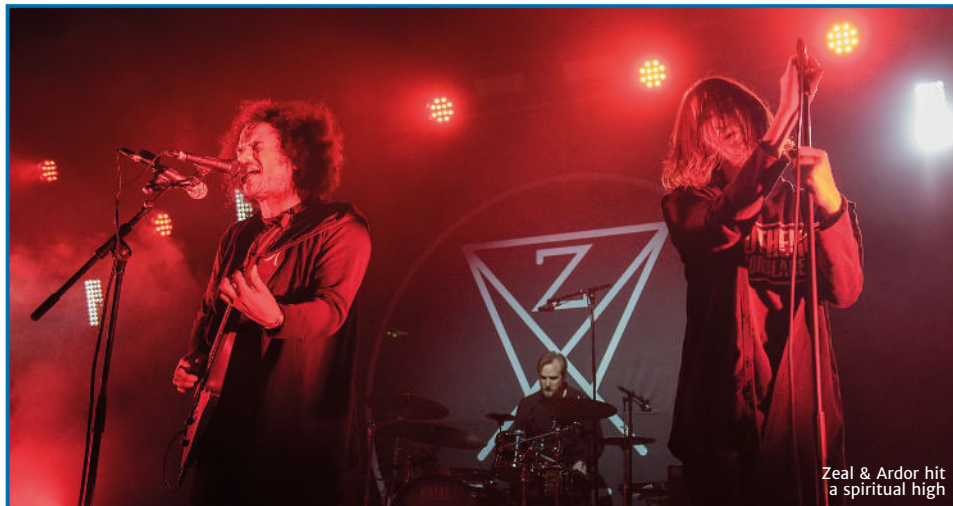
THURSDAY

One of the UK's real festival success stories, ArcTanGent's growth is testament to the loyalty instilled through its dedication to all things post-, progressive, noisy and fiddly. Attracting 10,000 fans to a farm in north Somerset for its eighth iteration is an affirmation of this steadfast commitment.

THE HYENA KILL kick things off in acerbic style, with a rambunctious forging ahead of their more experimental wing. Despite their line-up changes, post-metal collective **PIJN** feel as powerful and vital as ever. **SKIN FAILURE** feature ex-Black Peaks vocalist Will Gardner alongside members of Memory Of Elephants. They don't disappoint, approaching thrash with the joyful exuberance of Mutoid Man or Municipal Waste. **DVNE**'s lush sludge-meets-prog loses none of its intricacies on the main stage and their four-song set feels as epic as the book they take their name from.

A.A. WILLIAMS attracts a busy crowd for her transcendent performance. *Control* and *Belong* are extraordinary in their power and frailty but it's the new material that impresses the most. **PUPPY** pull a surprisingly small crowd, which is a shame considering recent album *Pure Evil* has given the power pop metal trio a couple of fistfuls of singalong anthems. **CRYPTIC SHIFT**'s inter-dimensional death metal is a stunning exercise in imaginative world-building. *Planetary Hypnosis* delivers the coup de grâce after a bombardment of trailblazing subplots. Sound gremlins rob **IMPERIAL TRIUMPHANT** of a ferocious start, but they soon pummel a captivated audience into all sorts of twisted, distorted shapes. Marrying the ferocity of black metal to fluid jazz rhythms, IT are as uncompromising as music gets but the crowd lap up the stomach-churning changes of pace. An ecstatic crowd greets **ALCEST**'s blackgaze dreamscapes. Given their monumental influence on a genre that ATG punters have fully embraced, it's no surprise they're received so rapturously, with the crowd almost drowning out the band during *Kodama* and a gorgeous *Délivrance*.

BOSSK's balance of the dreamy and despairing coupled with driving riffs is made even more unmissable when Cult Of Luna's Johannes joins them for the abrasive *Menhir*. **BOSS KELOID**'s mutant mash-up is helped by Alex Hurst possessing one of the weekend's most commanding voices, which gives their proggy armoury even more firepower. **AMENRA**'s cathartic purging is as powerful as it's ever been. The dynamics are some of the broadest in metal and their stark visuals and mammoth light show provide a hypnotic focal point that attract a large late-afternoon



crowd. One of the highlights from ATG's last outing, **CULT OF LUNA** return as conquering heroes. Each track builds from a sense of foreboding to walls of cathartic sound. Finishing with the monumental *Blood Upon Stone*, the exhausted figure of drummer Thomas Hedlund is reflected by the mentally spent throng digesting the magnitude of what has just unfolded.

FRIDAY

Day two sees **MØL** continue their ascent. Kim Song Sternkopf's vocals are devastatingly brutal and the band provide a beautiful wave of distorted, cataclysmic sound. **SLOW CRUSH** make some of the most ethereal sounds of the weekend, living up to their moniker with delicate melodies that take their time building to enormous, inescapable swells. **ORANSSI PAZUZU**'s trance-inducing, BM-inflected psychedelia is beguiling, mesmerising and magnificent all at once. Playing the vast majority of latest album *Mestarin Kynsi*, they sound like nothing else on this particular planet. Boasting cloaks, onstage rituals and GCSE-level stage props, corpse paint and visuals, **ZETRA**'s duo's gothic synthwave is hypnotic enough to banish any accusations of pandering to parody. The magnificently millinered **ARABROT** win the festival's best-dressed prize, with the Norwegians' brand of "dirty rock'n'roll" covering an award-winning array of kaleidoscopic flavours too. Their rudimentary bop take on traditional spiritual *Sinnerman* sounds like nothing else this weekend. **RIVERS OF NIHIL** swagger onstage with an unabashed confidence. Though too much reliance is placed on backing tracks, the transformative death metal of *Clean* and *Focus* captivates and causes chaos. The reincarnated **STAKE** (née Steak

Number Eight) have no problems utilising every volt of the third stage's PA, or its apparatus. Closing with demented new song *F*ck My Anxiety*, vocalist Brent Vanneste uses the pole conveniently placed in the middle of the stage itself to get high enough so that everyone can see his orange dungarees.

MONO are ATG favourites, and the Japanese post-rockers bring a powerful set that shows off their incredible dynamic range. *Riptide* sounds gargantuan and *Nowhere, No Here* builds to an utterly audacious climax. But the set feels particularly special when A.A. Williams joins them for an electrifying *Exit In Darkness*. Not content with being one of the most inimitable forces in music, **ZEAL & ARDOR** have also become a formidable live presence. Manuel Gagneux's affable charisma helps break up the ungodly enchantments of the band's new material and the perversely anthemic *Row Row* and *Blood In The River*.

The lockdown Portals show demonstrated that **TESSERACT** have the poise and vision to wow the biggest crowds, and it's thrilling to see the spectacular visuals, clinical performance and commanding attitude of the band in full flight. Encouragingly, new song *Natural Disaster* is a tantalising glimpse of even greater heights to come.

SATURDAY

Summoning the sound of an entire orchestra with only an electric cello and a loop pedal, **JO QUAIL** wrings extraordinary emotional depth as she reawakens the senses on day three, showing how classical music can merge with modern technology in beautiful harmony. **THE HIRSCH EFFEKT** mix the rough with the smooth effortlessly, with the German trio's new song *Nares* being the most thrilling of their set. The tent is absolutely rammed for

CONJURER – a band whose uncompromising approach suits this festival perfectly, and new material from latest album *Páthos* sounds even more expansive and sprawling on record. They're treated like the world-class metal act they are, and it's glorious to see.

FRONTIERER are chaos incarnate, their electro/mathcore mash-up eliciting an utterly frenzied response from a crowd more accustomed to stroking their beards than creating circle-pits. Not many are drawn to **FAMYNE**'s goth-tinged doom, which is a shame as they miss out on the bellicose *Defeated* and the drawn-out, atmospheric gloom of *Babylon* from their latest album.

An outdoor festival is not an ideal setting for something as frail, delicate and personal as **EMMA RUTH RUNDLE**'s run-through of her incredible new album, *Engine Of Hell*. But as soon as the opening chords of *Return* ring out, the packed tent falls completely silent, mesmerised by one of the most elegant and exquisite performances of the entire festival. Emma brings the audience to her, with her half-whispered vocals, gentle acoustic finger-picking and haunting piano chords. Rumours have been circulating all weekend about what mad shit **THE ARMED** have got planned. During the event the bedlam is confined to the stage until members head into the crowd for the final song, with their performance built more on energy than musical impact.

PALLBEARER play their debut, *Sorrow And Extinction*, in its entirety. Every note is quarried from the earth and delivered in the most enthralling fashion, continuing to ring out long after *Given To The Grave* has ended. **LIGHTNING BOLT** are an assault on the senses, but in the most gloriously batshit way possible. Drummer Brian Chippendale's drumming is an absolute sight to behold, like an octopus being electrocuted, propelling Brian Gibson's mammoth riffs into orbit.

TWDY (formally This Will Destroy You) provide a full stop on the heavy frenetic shit going on throughout the day with their languorous, beautiful post-rock. Their shows can evoke euphoria, but they're not at their best today, even if *The Mighty Rio Grande* and *Quiet* evoke an enthusiastic response from the pensive crowd. Given the importance of the programmed drums and electronic squelches to **GODFLESH**, it's a worry when seconds into opener *Love Is A Dog From Hell*, Justin Broadrick stops and announces that "The laptop fell off!" Luckily the punishing, relentless service is quickly resumed.

Arguably the most significant band to play ArcTanGent, **OPETH** end proceedings with the weekend's best songs, singalongs and stand-up ("I'm in a Drop D tuning, which was invented by Robb Flynn"). Though a few sound issues and an early finish blemish the Swedes' set, the eloquence of *The Drapery Falls* and *Deliverance* are reminders of Mikael Åkerfeldt and co's incalculable talent, and a sublime end to three days of sonic adventures.

ADAM BRENNAN/REMFY DEDMAN



Opeth: Mikael Åkerfeldt is in like Flynn



Tesseract open up a new tech metal dimension



Cult Of Luna: transcendent and resplendent



Imperial Triumphant take ArcTanGent on a gilt trip

Haken refuse to go djently
into that good night

RADAR FESTIVAL 2022

CASINO NIGHTCLUB, GUILDFORD

Leoprous, Haken and Conjurer lead a three-day show of forward-thinking force

GUILDFORD'S PROGRESSIVE METAL weekend has returned after a three-year hiatus to find new time signatures to bludgeon your brains with. Following a string of locally sourced warm-up acts, **DEVIL SOLD HIS SOUL** are the first proper draw on Friday. It's an uphill battle for the post-hardcore connoisseurs. They're down a guitarist and saddled with a poor mix, but when they click, they're untouchable. Unjustly stuffed into the basement that is the second stage are **PRESS TO MECO**, whose genre-splicing rock deserves to be cramming stadiums. Upstairs, **HUMANITY'S LAST BREATH** bring the beefy slam, offset by a bit more beefy slam. Experimental they ain't, but they're heavier than a continental shelf. Headliners **LEPROUS** rock up 25 minutes late, although the second they open with the lush *Out Of Here*, all is forgiven. *Slave* and *From The Flame* are progressive pop-metal masterclasses, the sound is flawless and strobe lights flash so wildly they may as well be spelling out "fucking rad" in Morse code.

EL MOONO are greeted by a minuscule turnout on Saturday, for which Guildford should hang its head in shame. Their indie-flecked groove metal packs more wallop than **THECITYISOURS**, whose electronicore is limp enough to make Attack Attack! sound like Ulcerate. Calls for movement are left

unanswered by the crowd. **BLACK ORCHID EMPIRE** cleanse palates with their roaring riffs and rock refrains, just in time for **CONJURER** to lay waste to Radar. Since emerging in 2016 they've been British metal's nastiest force, and they pummel the crowd into submission. Band of the weekend.

With a six-piece line-up that includes three guitarists, **BOSSK** forgo their post-rock atmospheres and continue the violence unabated as fill-in singer Simon Wright deals the killing blow with his roar. Below deck, **CABAL**'s deathcore is as delicate as a Freddy Krueger handjob. Space is tight, but there's always room for a pit when the beatdowns hit this hard. **SOEN** surf in on a wave of melodic prog metal anthems, with tracks like *Antagonist* and *Monarch* upholding the genre's predilection for bombastic choruses, if not the mind-warping song structures. Despite being delayed by tech troubles, **A.A. WILLIAMS** is a beautifully sombre counterweight. She floors the second stage with her heartbreaking meditations – until the annoyingly punctual **HAKEN** arrive upstairs and drown her out. The headliners are especially rowdy, having found an affinity for balls-out metal on their *Vector/Virus* albums. *Prosthetic* punctures with staccato thrash riffs, before *Nil By Mouth* feeds Guildford chugging djent. They've never projected as powerfully as they do tonight.



Cage Fight: unleashed
and ready to rumble

PALM READER expand their line-up to smack Radar with a wall of sound on Sunday, as Josh Mckeown's voice soars with emotive choruses. You needn't be a fortune-teller to know they'll go far. Juxtaposing silly sax toots with barrelling drums, **POLY-MATH** make jazz burly as fuck. They go harder than actual 'metal' band **HACKTIVIST** – the rap rockers that can't coherently rap or pen a rock hook. In contrast, **CAGE FIGHT**'s supply the piss and vinegar, their snarling, crossover thrash metal making for a relentless 40 minutes.

The weekend's biggest crowd swarms for **PLINI**. The guitar god is prog's Snuggie, enveloping Guildford with his smooth-as-silk solos and warm, welcoming banter. Also, his technical perfection makes the metalcore heavies below, **OUR HOLLOW, OUR HOME**, sound like sulking toddlers. Even when they break into pop refrains like *Loneshark*'s, it's never as bewitching as what's gone down upstairs. At least **DIRTY LOOPS**' danceable funk-jazz ends the weekend on a high, concluding a sold-out day with thousands sashaying their way back home.

MATT MILLS

CHURCH ROAD RECORDS' 5TH BIRTHDAY SHOW

THE BLACK HEART, LONDON

Tonight, The Black Heart plays host to the celebration of half a decade of one of the most consistently brilliant underground labels in the UK. Employed To Serve's Justine Jones and Sammy Urwin have spent those years scouring the globe for its finest new talent, and the breadth and brilliance of this evening's bill is irrefutable proof of just how great their Church Road Records imprint is.

Due to a stacked bill it's an early start, which means many can't actually make it in for *Candescent A.D.* – apologies to them – but **BURNER** kick the rest of the night off in sublime style. The London four-piece nail their hardcore/death metal mash-up, with waves of big bouncing grooves and boisterous two-step punch coalescing expertly. They also happen to have a guitar tone sharper than the molars of a shark with private dental care, and sound a lot like much-loved, crusty Belgian hardcore legends Rise And Fall.

Justine is wearing a My Bloody Valentine t-shirt, so perhaps we shouldn't be surprised to learn she wanted to sign **GRAYWAVE**, who steal the entire night with their gargantuan shoegaze-meets-post-rock vibes. They manage to turn a small room above a bar into a transcendental experience, the chiming, climbing compositions feeling like rarified air among the chaos of the rest of the evening. They also have a guitarist who has the same unusual style and approach to his instrument that made both Killing Joke's Geordie Walker and Siouxsie And The Banshees' John McGeoch such revered characters. They might just be one of the best new bands in the country.

The brutality comes back when **NOCTULE**, the side-project of Svalbard's Serena Cherry, take to the stage. Playing black metal inspired by the videogame *Skyrim* is certainly niche, but it adds something personal and unique to the genre and, as you can see from the grin on Serena's face, is clearly inspired by pure passion.

Headliners **TUSKAR** should come with a health warning. They are inhumanly loud, with a guitar tone so heavy it would make Atlas' knees buckle. The duo's noise rock-inspired take on *Remission*-era Mastodon sludge is truly something to behold, and, maybe most impressively, they don't seem to have forgotten to write song actual songs to go along with the sadistic savagery of their music. It's a fitting close to an evening celebrating some of metal's most exciting prospects. Great label, great night.

STEPHEN HILL



Leprous dazzle both retinas and eardrums



Conjurer align themselves with the dark side

Ithaca: Djamilia Azzouz savours the moment

ITHACA

PUPIL SLICER / GRIEF RITUAL / GUTTER

THE VICTORIA, BIRMINGHAM

London's post-hardcore firebrands decimate the Midlands

LEEDS' GUTTER SOUND like they were belched from Hell itself. Tortured screams wrestle with low-end growls as their bug-eyed vocalist conducts the chaos. **GRIEF RITUAL** are masters of blackened misery, tracks like *Dissolution* and *Immurement* plying their trade in unbridled, sludge-laden nastiness. The furore that erupts for **PUPIL SLICER**'s skull-threatening racket is deafening from the off. Unhinged shrieks are bolstered by guttural bellows as the band unleash a masterclass in mathcore-meets-deathgrind, its frenzied delivery cutting through the dense air like a freshly sharpened blade. Awash with demented grooves, *Vilified* is a true scene-stealer.

Stepping out in support of juggernaut second LP *They Fear Us*, metallic post-hardcore five-piece **ITHACA** proceed to eviscerate bigots and naysayers via a chaotic melange of metal and punk belligerence shot through with bursts of expansive beauty. Resplendent in vibrant orange chiffon, vocalist Djamilia Boden Azzouz coolly surveys the swelling hordes, her vitriolic screams of *'It's not a job, it's a service and I get paid in satisfaction!'* whipping all and sundry into a sweaty froth on riff-soaked opener *In The Way before The Future Says Thank You's* mix of howls and clean hooks

showcases the band's ability to pivot from throat-shredding hardcore to more melodic trappings without ever compromising on attitude or heaviness.

Moments of spoken calm among the chaos are sparse, but when the band do banter with the crowd – "We've had such an incredible response to [the new album] and if you're connecting with the themes as well as the riffs, we're winning" – it's met with eardrum-bursting levels of noise and only seems to further incite those here. The entire floor of the venue is bouncing during *Cremation Party*, meanwhile *Fluorescent* and the album's title track deftly weave between furious barrages of muscular beatdowns, snarling lyrics (*'Bow before your God!'*) and shoegaze-y luminescence. Those guitar harmonies during the latter are nothing short of hair-raising; for a few moments, it's akin to floating along on an undulating progressive wave.

Towards the set's end, Djamilia's good-humoured admission of "I wish we could do more, but I'm genuinely fearing for my safety!" is met with laughs but proves justified, as the sheer rabidity closer *Impulse Crush* incites is outrageous. The pits explode one final time, packing all the power of a grenade. Ithaca are on career-defining form.

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

GRAVE LINES

FIVE THE HIEROPHANT / TORPOR

229 THE VENUE, LONDON

A band with deep roots in London's underground scene, tonight's headliners have forged a clear community around them as the 229 hosts some of the city's most intrepid bands and a sold-out crowd, making tonight an intimate, attentive act of celebration. **TORPOR** set the nocturnal tone, their cavernous, doom-laden trudge taking on an ever-expanding, ritualistic air as bristling grooves are swathed in luminous, baleful atmospheres like wraiths swirling around your pineal gland. It's an unnerving state of delirium that **FIVE THE HIEROPHANT** take a parallel, instrumental route to. Their cowed, bare-footed frontman writhes over an alto sax as the band's mantric momentum buffets Middle Eastern melodies and tracks build up towards a state of critical mass that, even if they're not fully reached, still make for the most scenic of journeys. When it comes to carving out sonic space, however, **GRAVE LINES** are untouchable. Doom might be the starting point, but their subterranean detours are an immersive fever dream. Tonight they're launching their new album, *Communion*, and it gives frontman Jake Harding new scope to explore his range, from long-incarcerated howls to rich sonorous laments reminiscent of Dead Can Dance's Brendan Perry. If Grave Lines sound like an ongoing, hallucinatory journey, tonight suggests they've fully arrived.

JONATHAN SELZER

UADA

PANZERFAUST

ELECTROWERKZ, LONDON

With a name like **PANZERFAUST**, it's obvious what they sound like, right? Turns out they're a revelation – a dark, twisted, crawling mass of discordant riffing and crushing, doom-laden noise. With a set drawn from their recently completed war-themed album trilogy, *The Suns Of Perdition*, the Canadian quartet are simply incredible. Their take on black metal is forward-thinking and progressive, but in the dingy Elektrowerkz their bloody faces and claustrophobic riffing is the stuff of nightmares. If there's any justice they'll be huge. Portland black metallers **UADA** are just as revelatory. Theirs is a more epic take on black metal, fusing Cascadian soundscapes with triumphant Swedish melodic BM. Backlit in white and all clad in black hoods, they make an austere presence, and their facelessness serves to emphasise the vast storm of their music. By turns hypnotic and stirring, they are as majestic as black metal gets. Tonight offers an incredible pairing, and we can but hope they will both be back to these shores soon.

ALASTAIR RIDDELL

Vended: Griffin Taylor can feel stardom beckoning

VENDED

GRAPHIC NATURE

THE BLACK HEART, LONDON

Metal's heirs apparent state their case in Camden

CAMDEN'S BLACK HEART is rarely as rammed as it is this evening. It's not surprising – the opportunity to see as hotly tipped a new band as Vended play their first ever headline show outside of their home country doesn't come around too often, and so it's one of those sweat-dripping-from-the-walls kind of evenings. Anticipation is in the air too, and so when **GRAPHIC NATURE** arrive to warm us all up, they have a heaving, captive audience in front of them. The Kent band are young, with only a handful of gigs under their belt, and although their songs are heavy, springy and groove-filled modern metal, they could do with utilising a bit more variety and dynamism. They are a confident bunch, though, and their between-song interludes use elements of hip hop, trance and trip

hop in rather interesting ways. Maybe if they could find room for those ideas in their actual songs then they could be onto something interesting, but right now, they're filed in the 'untapped potential' category.

Soft Cell's classic version of *Tainted Love* gets the first mass singalong of the evening as **VENDED** confidently strut onstage in the now furnace-like venue. It's not often you feel such excitement from a band with such a meagre amount of material available to the general public. At present you can only listen to seven Vended songs, all of which are screamed back to the band with intense enthusiasm, but they have the stagecraft of a band who have been releasing albums and playing arenas for more than a decade.

It might be in the genes, of course. Much has been made of Vended

featuring two members Slipknot's offspring, and both Simon Crahan and Griffin Taylor probably won't be grateful for it being mentioned, but they do both seem to have inherited something from their illustrious fathers. Simon has that unhinged look of wanton destruction in his eyes. He throws himself around the stage, along with the rest of the band, and Griffin certainly has a set of pipes eerily similar to Corey's. No shame in that: quite the opposite in fact, as Taylor Jr. nails ferocious roars and gruff croons in an effortless manner. OK, Vended are not a million sonic miles away from the band they will no doubt be forever compared to, but on tonight's evidence, they have enough character and charisma to forge their own path.

STEPHEN HILL



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You've been releasing music on your Patreon for the past couple of years. Was it always the plan after leaving Delain to continue as a solo artist?

"When I started releasing music on Patreon, there was no talk of the band breaking up yet [in 2021, Delain's line-up dissolved, leaving only keyboardist Martijn Westerholt]. I had these songs that were so different from Delain, and I wanted to have a place for them. If I hadn't already had that platform when the band broke up, I wouldn't have gotten it together that fast. I probably would have gone into a black hole because it wasn't the greatest time. I was glad I could just say, 'OK, this will become my full focus.' It was really a safety net."

You recently announced your band for your first live show as a solo artist. How's that going?

"Today we've been rehearsing. We have our first gig at Tivoli [in Utrecht, the Netherlands] on October 23 – a double release show for *Tales From Six Feet Under Volumes I and II*. It's a full set of 20-plus songs that have never been played by a band – I put it together by myself on a laptop with a bunch of plug-ins, so it has to be translated to humans. I play some things, but sometimes we go into songs and I'm sitting there thinking, 'Oh God, I hope I didn't write something that requires three hands to play, or four, or five...!'"

What's it been like playing with your former bandmates Timo, Otto and Joey again?

"It's always felt great playing with them and doing it again kind of feels like coming home."

That sounds really nice.

"Definitely! I was a bit scared in the beginning, because I thought if we were going to do something together

"I WANTED WITCHY VIBES AND MONSTERS. I WANTED TO HAVE A CULT!"

FIVE MINUTES WITH

CHARLOTTE WESSELS

The symphonic metal hero and newly established solo artist talks folk horror, getting drastic haircuts, and life after Delain

WORDS: CATHERINE MORRIS



again, it would be as a band. But then... I was nervous, because if you have a band, it can break up again. It might sound weird, but I was very honoured that the guys wanted to play my songs. That was really heartwarming."

Can you tell us a little bit about the recent video you made for the track *Afkicken*? It's so cinematic.

"I love folk horror, so I wanted it to have witchy, coven vibes. I wanted monsters, I wanted to have a cult, I wanted to have dance – the costumes were directly inspired by [the 2018 remake of] *Suspiria*. I get taken in by a cult and they imprison me and shave my head."

...Which you did for real. How did that come about?

"I've always been curious to know what that would be like, and when we were planning that end scene we thought, 'How could we make me look really miserable?' And I just blurted out, 'We could cut all my hair off!' Everyone laughed it off, but I was like, 'No, for real!' I did hesitate up until about two days before the shoot. I'm having my first proper haircut next week; maybe I'll bleach it."

It looks really cool! What's the reaction been like?

"Every post is like, 'Please grow your hair back!' I don't mind – I think I look better with long hair too, but that's not the point. It doesn't have to be a fucking priority to look a certain way all the time. I didn't go into it wanting to make a statement, but I did get something out of it in that sense, because nine times out of 10 now it's not a priority for me to look conventionally 'pretty'. It's the same thing where I've been making symphonic metal for 16 years, and then because on *Tales...* there were some poppier songs, people got upset, like, 'Don't you like metal anymore?!' Dude, I love pancakes, but don't give them to me every day! A change is healthy and makes you appreciate what you got."

You've been hanging out with Epica's Simone Simons and Myrkur's Amalie Bruun. What were you up to?

"We weren't just hanging out, but I'm not allowed to tell you what we were doing. But I can tell you that it's going to be fun!" **H**

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